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FOUR PLAYS

BY

A. A. MILNE

TO HAVE THE HONOUR

BELINDA

THE DOVER ROAD

MR PIM PASSES BY

GIFTED BY

SRI A. GAUTAMA S/O LATE
A. MADASIMHA F. C. KRANTAPUR.



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HARMONDSWORTH MIDDLESEX ENGLAND

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TO HAVE THE HONOUR

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

IMPORTANT

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Messrs Samuel French, Ltd ,
26 Southampton Street, Strand,
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CHARACTERS

SIMON BATTERSBY
ANGELA (*his daughter*)
JENNIFER
PARLOURMAID
CAPTAIN HOLT
ETHEL HOLT
MRS FAITHFULL
IMOGEN FAITHFULL
DOCTOR AINSLIE
PRINCE MICHAEL
JAMES OLIVER

*The living-room in Simon Battersby's cottage, Wych
Trentham*

ACT I	Before dinner
ACT II	After dinner
ACT III	Next morning

This play was first produced by Sir Gerald du Maurier at Wyndham's Theatre on April 22, 1924, with the following cast

<i>Simon Battersby</i>	H O NICHOLSON
<i>Angela</i>	FAITH CELLI
<i>Jennifer</i>	MADGE TITHERADGE
<i>Captain Holt</i>	BASIL LODER
<i>Ethel Holt</i>	UNA VENNING
<i>Mrs Faithfull</i>	GRACE LANE
<i>Imogen</i>	JOAN CLEMENT SCOTT
<i>Dr Ainslie</i>	ERIC STANLEY
<i>Prince Michael</i>	GERALD DU MAURIER
<i>James Oliver</i>	GEORGE PENN
<i>Parlourmaid</i>	DORIS COOPER

TO HAVE THE HONOUR

ACT I

The Scene is the Living-room in the country cottage of the BATTERSBYS (father and daughter), a room of oak-beams, distempered walls and lattice windows. At the back, between the windows is a door, wide open to the garden. There is a door on the right which leads to the other inhabited parts of the house. Along the left side of the room a staircase ascends easily, to meet at right angles a low gallery from which bedrooms may be reached. The door on the left of the gallery is that of ANGELA'S room. To the right the gallery leads to BATTERSBY'S room and the bathroom. Underneath the stairs is a "glory-hole" with a curtain across it.

It is nearly 8 o'clock on a warm evening in May. Being summer time it is still full daylight, and no attempt has been made to pretend otherwise. The women's dresses must take their chance. Time enough to light up after dinner, particularly as electricity has not yet discovered Wych Trentham.

ANGELA, aged 18, half-dressed, in rather a casual wrap, cigarette-holder in mouth, is moving about the room with a slow, indifferent grace, which is much too charming to be a physical attribute only. Her indolence, both of voice and movement, is part of herself, she has the au—odd, and therefore attractive, on such a youthful prettiness—of living in another world, with a faint smile for this one. At present she is tidying up the room for her dinner-party, not with any sort of fussiness, but in the care-free manner of one to whom it has occurred casually in the middle of her dressing that Royalty may be here at any moment, and that her

father's dog-bitten slippers may be in any corner of the room. While we watch her, she stoops down and collects one from underneath the sofa, looks thoughtfully about, moves a chair and discloses the other one. She takes the pair and drops them in the glory-hole. Then she speaks, raising her voice a little

ANGELA Are you out of the bath, Father ?

(She goes on tidying old newspapers now. BATTERSBY opens the door of his bedroom and looks out.)

BATTERSBY In a sense, yes, dear. I was just going in.

ANGELA *(to herself)* Good Heavens !

BATTERSBY I'm very quick. *(His head begins to go back.)*

ANGELA You've put the wine out ? *(Silence. BATTERSBY's head stops its movement.)* Oh Lord, he hasn't.

BATTERSBY *(firmly, as he comes out, tying his dressing-gown)* I am putting the wine out. *(He comes down the stairs, a man of about 50, tall and bearded. In a towelled bath-gown and bedroom slippers he is unconventionally dressed for the dining-room, but you feel that he would always be a little like that. He has a quick, nervous way of talking, as if he were communing, rather apologetically, with himself.)* And the cigars. *(He goes into the glory-hole.)*

ANGELA *(resigned)* Anyway, everybody knows we're always late in this house.

BATTERSBY *(coming out with two boxes of cigars)* He wouldn't know.

ANGELA Well, he will after to-night.

BATTERSBY That's true. There are only four of the good cigars left.

ANGELA Surely he won't want more than four ?

BATTERSBY One requires a certain margin. And then there are the others. This secretary fellow, Holt, and the Doctor, isn't it ? Five with me.

ANGELA I can't have my medical attendant puffing cigars in a hygienic house like this.

BATTERSBY He'd prefer his pipe, in any case. So, if Holt has one of the cheaper brand, and the secretary and

I have one good one each, that will leave two for the Prince (*He puts the four Coronas on top of a broken box of cheaper ones*) I shall tell Holt that the lower ones are nuttier. What about the wine? Champagne, I suppose.

ANGELA (*thoughtfully*) Emily broke the corkscrew the last time we had champagne. I wonder if we've got another.

BATTERSBY That was an inferior brand. I have some better than that.

ANGELA She'd better make a popping noise as she takes the cork out—to be on the safe side. Have you got enough?

BATTERSBY A dozen.

ANGELA Half a bottle each, and seven and a half bottles for the Prince. That ought to be all right.

BATTERSBY My dear, you're looking forward to seeing him again just as much as I am. (*Opening an empty box*) I suppose you've got some cigarettes.

ANGELA Some. A Prince seems much more natural in the South of France. You sit next to him at lunch, and he's like anybody else. In England you feel a snob to be meeting him at all.

BATTERSBY He invited himself. *We* didn't ask him.

ANGELA I don't say I *am* a snob. I say I *feel* a snob.

BATTERSBY Pooh! What's a Prince?

ANGELA And I don't say I *feel* undressed, I *am* undressed. (*She pulls her wrap round her, and strolls upstairs*) Go and tell Emily about the champagne.

BATTERSBY Prince Michael Robolski of Neo-Slavonia—there are hundreds like that all over Europe. Penny plain, twopence coloured.

ANGELA (*on the stairs*) Yes, but only one in Wych Trentham. So we must make the most of him. (*She goes into her room*)

BATTERSBY (*mumbling to himself*) What's a Prince in this democratic age? (*He goes kitchenwards*)

(*The room is empty for a moment, and then JENNIFER appears at the garden door. She is 30, and so overflowing with vitality that some of it has got into her figure, and led to the word "buxom" being used. But she is tall enough, and big enough, mentally and physically, to carry it*

off with an au She enjoys her world, she enjoys herself It is jolly being JENNIFER
Nobody is about, so she announces herself)

JENNIFER (*loudly*) How do you do? So good of you to come (*Shyly*) So kind of you to ask me

ANGELA (*off*) Oh, is that you, darling?

JENNIFER Yes At least it was yesterday It's Jennifer

ANGELA (*appearing in the gallery*) You're early, aren't you?

JENNIFER I haven't really come yet Am I dining?

ANGELA Of course Life and soul of the party

JENNIFER That's a comfort I just stepped across to make sure Last time, you remember, you sent me away and told me to come in afterwards Luckily I had a little cold beef in the house But there's something about sitting down to cold beef and pickles in diamonds and a dress with no back to it— Well, I just stepped across to make sure And now I'll step back again

ANGELA Oh, stop now you're here!

(*She disappears into her room for a moment, but JENNIFER doesn't realise that she has gone*)

JENNIFER Good gracious, no! And be introduced to the Prince with a crowd of others? Never on your life! I shall make a late but superb entry All the men will look at me, and say, "Thank God, now we can eat", and all the women will look at me and say (quite correctly), "She came late on purpose, how like her", and the Prince will look at me, with a sudden reviving interest in what he had feared would be a very dull evening, and he'll say, "*Chere Madame*"—Or does he talk English? (*There is no answer She realises that she is alone*) Have I been soliloquising all this time?

ANGELA (*coming out*) Sorry What did you say?

JENNIFER My last words, when solitude descended upon me, were, "Does he talk English?"

ANGELA Perfectly (*She comes slowly downstairs, still smoking*)

JENNIFER You should have mentioned it in your invitation We've all been rubbing up our *Easy French in Six Lessons* Well, then, the Prince will say, "Ah, dear Lady, this was indeed worth waiting for" No, that

isn't very good Well—anyhow—he'll look at me And there's more of me to look at every day

ANGELA It is ridiculous of you to pretend that you're fat Why do you ?

JENNIFER I don't No woman pretends she's fat But every woman over thirty is afraid On her thirtieth birthday she starts looking at herself in the glass, and saying, "Is it, or is it not?" And a morning comes when she says, "I wonder" I said it this morning I say, where *is*—wherever it is ?

ANGELA Neo-Slavonia ? I don't know (*With a wave of her cigarette*) Down at the bottom on the night, I suppose Somewhere

JENNIFER They make geography so quickly nowadays that I can't keep up with it

ANGELA A sort of buffer-state (*She gives JENNIFER her ear-rings*) There's a dear I shall make a mess of my hair

JENNIFER (*fixing them*) If one has never heard of a country, one always calls it "a sort of buffer-state" "Miss Angela Battersby was wearing the family drops" It must be difficult to feel very patriotic about a country which is only used so as to prevent two other countries from getting at each other Other ear

ANGELA (*turning round*) It's never difficult to feel very patriotic

JENNIFER True At least it's never difficult to feel how very unpatriotic other people are My buffer, 'tis of thee ! Is he very good-looking ?

ANGELA Not bad

JENNIFER And, to get down to my own class, what's the secretary like ? There !

ANGELA (*looking at herself in the glass*) Thanks We haven't seen him The Prince wrote to say that he was in London Could he—and so on ? I said, Delighted Then he wrote that he and his secretary were at the Bull at Medenham Could they—and so forth ? I said, Of course I suppose he's a sort of courier, equerry, orderly, or whatever you call it I must go and finish myself (*She goes*)

JENNIFER Well, speaking as a widow with no desire to marry again, I wish you luck

ANGELA (*smiling mysteriously at her from half-way up the stairs*) Don't be vulgar, Jennifer

JENNIFER I like being vulgar It suits my shape Anyhow, darling, promise that I shall be the first to hear

ANGELA You're sure to be, I should think You're quite capable of hiding behind a tree, and listening (*She goes into her room*)

JENNIFER (*complacently*) I am (*Surveying herself*) And thank you for "tree," darling I was afraid you were going to say "bush" or "clump" (*Going*) About another quarter-of-an-hour, do you think, for my entry? (*ANGELA calls out something*) What?

ANGELA (*putting her head out*) You haven't got any French mustard, have you?

JENNIFER (*doubtfully*) With French mustard, you think?

ANGELA I knew I'd forgotten something

JENNIFER I'll bring some round, if you like

ANGELA (*retiring*) Do

JENNIFER I will

(*At which moment BATTERSBY comes back from the cellar*)

BATTERSBY Hallo, Jennifer, good-evening

JENNIFER Good-evening, Simon (*Reproachfully*) You never told me it was court dress!

BATTERSBY What? Oh! (*Looking at himself*) Just going to have a bath You couldn't be much sweller than you are, could you?

JENNIFER (*anxiously*) Much—what?

BATTERSBY Much more grand

JENNIFER (*reassured*) Oh! Just for a moment I— Well, a train and feathers

BATTERSBY He isn't really royalty, you know Neo-Slavonia is only—

JENNIFER (*nodding*) A sort of buffer-state

BATTERSBY Exactly And though, I understand, he's related to the reigning house—

JENNIFER There's no chance of Angela being a queen

ANGELA (*from her bedroom*) Send that woman away, Father And for goodness' sake, get dressed

BATTERSBY It's Jennifer, dear

ANGELA It sounded like Mrs Bulger

JENNIFER It is, darling,

BATTERSBY (*throwing up his hands*) If only it weren't! *Why did I mean, why don't* (*He shudders*)

JENNIFER (*innocently*) Don't you like my name?

BATTERSBY It's a horrible name

JENNIFER I love it Jennifer Bulger, widow of the late General James Bulger, C B It's sweet

BATTERSBY It may have been all right for *him*—we never knew him—but for *you*! Jennifer!

JENNIFER No, no, you mustn't propose in your dressing-gown

ANGELA (*off*) Is Father proposing *again*?

BATTERSBY (*shouting*) This is not a proposal It's an æsthetic impulse (*To JENNIFER*) I want you to have a name which becomes you You ought to be Jennifer Battersby, even at the cost of marrying *me*

JENNIFER Dear Simon, nice Simon You know you don't mean it

BATTERSBY I mean it, every time But I must admit that I'm always a little relieved when you refuse me

JENNIFER Dear Simon, of course you are

ANGELA (*looking out*) Oh, *come on*, Father!

JENNIFER (*soothingly*) I won't marry you

BATTERSBY Yes, but I don't think you must marry anybody else Promise me that you won't marry the Prince without my permission

JENNIFER Good gracious, that's two of us after him already! (*Firmly*) I promise nothing, but that I shall enjoy myself to-night

BATTERSBY You always do That's why you're so adorable

ANGELA (*from the gallery*) Give him a smile, Jennifer, and get rid of him

JENNIFER (*laughing happily*) I do like Battersbys There's something about them . *Au revoir!* (*She waves and is gone*)

(BATTERSBY *at last goes up to his bath*)

ANGELA Hurry up, darling

BATTERSBY (*impressively*) Have you ever seen forked lightning playing over water? That's me in my bath (*He disappears*)

(ANGELA remains on the gallery, as EMILY, the parlour-maid, comes in with a tray of cocktails)

ANGELA Are those the cocktails, Emily?

EMILY Yes, miss

ANGELA Good (She comes slowly downstairs, still smoking)

EMILY Ellen says I was to remind you about the French mustard, miss

ANGELA Mrs Bulger is bringing some round (She takes a cocktail)

EMILY Thank you, miss (Nervously) Do I say, "Your Royal Highness," miss?

ANGELA I really don't know (Drinking) "Your Highness," I should think But don't overdo it

EMILY Thank you, miss

ANGELA He won't throw anything at you, if you're wrong (Finishing her drink, and giving EMILY the glass) You'd better take this out (She goes back to her room)

EMILY Yes, miss (She goes out)

(ROBERT and ETHEL HOLT come in He, a thick-set young soldier, is just over 30, she just under He is a very serious young man, of a sort of determined intellectuality Nothing escapes him Even the lightest remark made by another requires thinking out She is a bright helpmeet for such a man, the best of wives, with, like most wives, more intelligence than appears on the surface, and enough character to look after herself)

ETHEL (brightly) Why, we're the first!

ROBERT (feeling his chin) I might have gone over it again, after all

ETHEL Better early than late Particularly with royalty

ROBERT Hardly royalty, dear Neo-Slavonia one of these small buffer-states which have sprung up since the Armistice All Mittel-Europa——

ETHEL (loudly) We're here, Angela! Are we very early?
(To ROBERT) Yes, dear

ROBERT All Mittel-Europa——

ANGELA (off) Hallo! Is that the Holts?

ETHEL You did say eight, didn't you?

ANGELA (*her head visible*) Did I? We're a bit late, I expect Do you want to take anything off?

ETHEL No, thank you, dear

ROBERT All Mittel-Europa——

ANGELA Have a drink, Robert

ROBERT Thanks

ANGELA Cigarettes (*A leather case sails into the room*)
Sorry

ETHEL (*picking it up*) Thank you, dear

ROBERT All Mittel-Europa—— (*Holding out drink*)
Will you have one, Ethel?

ETHEL I don't think so Well, perhaps I will No, later, I think (*She feels that she would like Royalty to see her drinking one*) I'll keep the Prince company (*She laughs a little self-consciously*) Cigarette?

ROBERT No, thanks (*He drinks*)

ETHEL I don't think I will either What were you saying about all Mittel-Europa, dear?

ROBERT (*drinking*) All Mittel-Europa is in a state of flux just now

ETHEL (*wearing her intelligent face*) I suppose so Naturally The War, of course And the Peace

ROBERT The old Empires are splitting up—disintegrating A sort of de-centralisation is going on And so you get these small states coming into a precarious existence Almost literally a case of "Here to-day and gone to-morrow"

ETHEL You must talk it over with the Prince—if he talks English, as I suppose he does They all do, don't they? I love listening to a good talk Men talk so well, I always think They say he's very good-looking

ROBERT In many cases, of course, these little states have a connected history of their own. Centuries ago, before they were absorbed into some ramshackle empire, they had their own court and customs You would probably find that they had never quite lost their individuality

ETHEL Individuality is the great thing, isn't it? Oh, did you find out whether we said "Sir" or "Your Highness" or "Prince"?

ROBERT I shall say "Sir," of course You'd better not say anything

ETHEL Yes, that's best, isn't it ?

(ANGELA still in her wrap, empty cigarette-holder in her mouth, comes down the stairs)

ANGELA Can I have my cigarettes ?

ROBERT (standing to attention) Good-evening

ETHEL (brightly) How are you, dear ? Here you are
(She goes, case in hand, to kiss her)

ANGELA (taking the case and avoiding the kiss) Thanks

ETHEL (with a little laugh) We were just wondering what one called your Prince

ANGELA (putting in a cigarette) As long as you don't call him *my* Prince, I don't mind what you call him I've only met him once

ROBERT Oh, is that so ? Monte Carlo, wasn't it ? (He strikes a match for her)

ANGELA Thanks That village above Mentone—what's its name ? Gorbio We went there one day With a party Sort of picnic He was one of them

ETHEL (with the air of one who knows Gorbio well) Oh, yes

ANGELA (strolling upstairs again) Shan't be long

(They watch her go)

ETHEL (as soon as it is safe) Well, if you ask me, I should say that Miss Angela Battersby must have made good use of that one day

ROBERT (uncomfortably, feeling that this is rather bad form) Oh, I don't know

ETHEL I mean it quite nicely, of course I can quite see the attraction She's so very British, isn't she ? That would always attract a foreigner

ROBERT (wondering if his country is being insulted) British ?

ETHEL That air of " Oh, is that you ? "

ROBERT I don't see that that's British exactly I should call it the individual rather than the type

ETHEL You know what I mean (With sudden inspiration) " I'm Angela Battersby, take it or leave it " There ! —that's what I mean I think it's rather attractive

ROBERT (frowning) But why British ?

ETHEL Well, that's rather what Englishmen say

ROBERT (wrestling) H'm ! I see what you mean

In a way—yes I suppose we do (*He looks at her with an admiration that would be flattering if it were not surprised*) Now what made you think of that?

ETHEL Oh, I'm not such a fool as you think

ROBERT I have never thought so for a moment Women often have surprising intuitions "I am an Englishman, take it or leave it" That's good, Ethel I must tell the Prince that

ETHEL (*eagerly*) You will say I said it, won't you?

ROBERT My dear, of course

ETHEL (*taking his arm*) Dear old boy! Let's go into the garden It's nicer outside

ROBERT (*coming*) You're quite right, Ethel We do

ETHEL Do what?

ROBERT That's why so many foreigners—

ETHEL (*as they approach the door*) Mrs Faithfull—I didn't know *she* was coming

(*But she is For here they are at the door—the Queen of Wych Trentham, and her only child, IMOGEN MRS FAITHFULL, short and square, with the absolute assurance of a woman of 55 who has to her credit the achievements of wifehood and motherhood, and can therefore speak with authority on all subjects, exercises her prerogatives benignly Practically all it comes to is that she expects the host to take her in At present she is very much a mother to IMOGEN, who at 18, ANGELA's age, is a dumb school-girl in the royal presence, and a precocious one in her absence*)

ETHEL (*brightly*) Good-evening Angela's still dressing We're early, so we're just going into the garden (*Which explains the whole thing*)

MRS FAITHFULL Good-evening, Ethel Good-evening, Captain Holt

ROBERT Good-evening (*To IMOGEN*) How are you, Miss Faithfull?

(*IMOGEN smiles shyly*)

MRS FAITHFULL Very well, thank you, Captain Holt

ETHEL (*to IMOGEN*) What a sweet dress, dear (*IMOGEN looks modest*)

MRS FAITHFULL Pink suits us We always try to keep to pink

ANGELA (*off*) Is that you Mrs Faithfull ? Do you want to take anything off, or would you rather have a cocktail ?

MRS FAITHFULL I will just come up for a moment, I think (*To IMOGEN*) You can keep that shawl on, dear, for the present It suits you (*She goes up the stairs*)

ANGELA (*off*) Robert, give Imogen a cigar or a drink or something

MRS FAITHFULL (*firmly*) No, thank you, Captain Holt (*She goes into ANGELA'S room*)

ETHEL (*to IMOGEN*) Come into the garden with us It's cooler there

ROBERT (*with glass*) Sure you won't ?

IMOGEN (*to ETHEL*) Have you had one ?

ETHEL No, I don't think just yet, perhaps

IMOGEN Oh ! (*She takes the drink*) Then I will And Mother will count and think it's your glass (*Drinking*) I don't like the taste *very* much, do you ? I suppose you get used to it I say, aren't you excited about the Prince ? Do you think he's a real Prince ? Do you think he's in love with Angela ? (*She drinks again*) I don't think I like this very much

ROBERT (*holding out his hand*) I shouldn't drink it if you don't like it

IMOGEN (*before letting go of the glass*) Would you leave half of yours, Mrs Holt ?

ETHEL I might I do sometimes

IMOGEN Oh, then that's all right (*To ROBERT*) Thank you (*To ETHEL*) Do we curtsy ?

ETHEL (*who hadn't thought of this*) Oh, no ! I don't—
(*Panic*)

IMOGEN I've been practising Up in my room (*She gives us one*) It looks jolly, doesn't it ! I've been doing it in front of the glass—mostly in a nightie (*She gives us another, not so successful*) It's easier in a nightie

ETHEL Oh, but Robert has just been explaining Neo-Slavonia is only—

ROBERT A sort of buffer-state

IMOGEN Mother says you just call him Prince Michael

I like "Sire" better, don't you? You've never met him, have you? I believe he's awfully good-looking

ROBERT It isn't like an English Prince, you know, Miss Faithfull You know, in Europe, "Prince" is just a title like Duke or Count That is to say——

ETHEL Oh, is that so, Robert?

IMOGEN Let's go into the garden, shall we? I won't smoke a cigarette, but if *you* would, Mrs Holt, and blow the smoke in my hair, Mother will think I've been smoking, and then you'll be able to tell her afterwards that I haven't

ETHEL (*her arm round IMOGEN*) Come on, you funny girl (*They go out, ROBERT still holding forth*)

ROBERT (*following*) This Prince Michael, you know, is probably not of the Royal Family—such as it is A distant connection, perhaps, but——

(*They are gone*)

(MRS FAITHFULL and ANGELA appear in the gallery)

ANGELA (*as they come downstairs*) Have a cocktail, won't you?

MRS FAITHFULL Thank you

(*She comes down, ANGELA after her, still undressed, still smoking*)

ANGELA Help yourself

MRS FAITHFULL (*helping herself*) He talks English, of course?

ANGELA Oh, yes

MRS FAITHFULL That's a comfort About how old, would you say?

ANGELA Thirty-five Forty

MRS FAITHFULL Oh, as old as that? Good-looking?

ANGELA All right

MRS FAITHFULL Who else are coming?

ANGELA Dr Ainslie

MRS FAITHFULL (*disapproving*) Oh!

ANGELA Jennifer

MRS FAITHFULL (*disapproving in a different way*) Ah!

There's something about her which would appeal to a foreigner, don't you think?

ANGELA Why to a foreigner, particularly?

MRS FAITHFULL Her figure is a little—foreign, don't you think?

ANGELA (*indifferently*) Is it ?

MRS FAITHFULL What sort of stavs does she wear—if any ? In my young days when stavs *were* stavs, you either had a ridge across the back or you hadn't. Nowadays, there's nothing to tell you whether they wear them or they don't

ANGELA We'll ask her at dinner to-night

MRS FAITHFULL Not in front of Imogen, dear, if you don't mind

ANGELA Doesn't she know about them ?

MRS FAITHFULL She's looking sweet to night, don't you think ? I'm sure the Prince will think so. A little English wild rose. And have *you* a pretty dress for us ?

ANGELA Same old blue

MRS FAITHFULL (*relieved*) Ah ! But it suits you very well, dear

ANGELA It's had long enough to get used to me

MRS FAITHFULL Still, if the Prince has never seen it——

BATTERSBY (*off*) Angela !

ANGELA Hallo !

BATTERSBY May I wear my old coat and soft shirt ?

ANGELA Why ever not ?

BATTERSBY Holt will have a white waistcoat, I suppose ?

ANGELA (*to* MRS FAITHFULL) Had he ?

MRS FAITHFULL Oh, yes ! (*Loudly*) Yes, Mr Battersby

BATTERSBY Oh, is that you, Mrs Faithfull ? Sorry I'm not ready

MRS FAITHFULL (*a little primly*) It's quite all right, thank you

BATTERSBY Well, then, Angela, if Holt has a white waistcoat, and I have a soft shirt, and Ainslie has an ordinary tail-coat with a stethoscope in it, the Prince is bound to be all right, *whatever* he wears

ANGELA The perfect host

BATTERSBY (*loudly*) What ?

ANGELA Soft shirt, darling

BATTERSBY Good ! Shan't be a moment, Mrs Faithfull

MRS FAITHFULL That's all right, thank you. Angela is looking after me. I always think Mr Battersby looks so artistic in his velvet coat. Of course this is quite an informal visit of Prince Michael's

ANGELA Naturally

MRS FAITHFULL Did you see much of him at Monte ?

ANGELA We met him

MRS FAITHFULL And he said, could he come and see you when he was in England ?

ANGELA He did say something about it, I believe

MRS FAITHFULL They often say it, but they don't always come

ANGELA (*sympathetically*) Don't they ?

MRS FAITHFULL Well, of course, I don't encourage it for Imogen Not abroad You never know Who is Who

ANGELA As long as they're amusing—

MRS FAITHFULL The amusing ones are never Who You can depend on that

ANGELA Then we're in for a dull evening

MRS FAITHFULL Oh, a Prince is different Prince Michael— (*Very carelessly*) We just call him Prince Michael, I suppose An informal visit, naturally I told Imogen, yes—he is sure to be interesting (*Vaguely*) All Europe just now, I think New groupings of nationalities One so rarely hears the real truth I am told that we are much nearer to another world-war than we think The Prince must tell us I suppose Neo-Slavonia is pro-Ally ?

ANGELA Are there any allies now ? They're fond of the English, I believe

MRS FAITHFULL Oh, well, that's a good thing

(*They are interrupted by JENNIFER*)

JENNIFER (*at the open door*) French mustard Don't tell me I ought to have gone to the back door with it

ANGELA Oh, thanks (*She puts the mustard on the table, and calls out*) Emily !

JENNIFER (*to MRS FAITHFULL*) Good-evening, dear What a charming dress ! (*To ANGELA*) May I go back and change mine ?

MRS FAITHFULL (*pleased*) We must do what we can when there are so many pretty young ones round us

JENNIFER (*with a charming, modest laugh*) Oh, how sweet— (*The laugh stops suddenly In which group is she included ? She says solemnly*) Yes We must

ANGELA (*indicating cocktail*) Have one ?

JENNIFER My dear, I daren't

ANGELA You *are* absurd

EMILY (*coming in*) Yes, miss ?

ANGELA (*nodding at it*) Mustard

(EMILY *takes it and goes out*)

JENNIFER (*resigned*) I suppose I shan't see *that* again

MRS FAITHFULL Angela was just telling me that the Neo-Slavonians are very fond of the English

JENNIFER Yes, Gladstone or somebody said something in 1874 which they have never quite forgotten but which I have

ANGELA What sort of thing ?

JENNIFER Legitimate aspirations which *although* . . . *yet* in the not far-distant future—— You know how they talk

MRS FAITHFULL (*nodding profoundly*) It is curious to think that if Mr Gladstone had never said—whatever exactly it was—fifty years ago, Prince Michael mightn't have been d'ning here to-night

JENNIFER And if Mr Faithfull had never said "I love you" twenty-five years ago, Imogen mightn't have been dining here to-night

MRS FAITHFULL (*stiffly*) That doesn't strike me as so curious

JENNIFER Still, it is interesting Angela, darling, if you don't get dressed, nobody will be dining here to-night

ANGELA (*lounging off*) I'm just ready (*She goes up*) The others are in the garden

JENNIFER I saw a pretty pink butterfly on the lawn I suppose that was Imogen

MRS FAITHFULL (*absently*) Yes, we always wear pink in the evening

JENNIFER (*suddenly*) Isn't it funny that there aren't any pink butterflies ? I'd never thought of it before. Reds and yellows and blues and browns and purples, but no pinks I wonder why ?

MRS FAITHFULL (*who doesn't wonder why*) We shall know one day, I daresay

JENNIFER I'd rather know now, because I'm sure to forget later on There will be so many questions to ask when we get to Heaven (*Childishly*) What's your first

one? I'll tell you what mine is. I shall say, "Now, *what* about all those stars? What were they there for?"

(MRS FAITHFULL *feels uncomfortably that there is nothing about this in the Church of England Services, and gets back to butterflies*)

MRS FAITHFULL The General must have seen many beautiful butterflies in India

JENNIFER He didn't talk about them

MRS FAITHFULL (*coming to the point*) What did happen at Monte, do you know?

JENNIFER (*at a loss*) Monty?

MRS FAITHFULL Between Angela and the Prince

JENNIFER Oh—Monte? I always call it Carlo
Did anything happen?

MRS FAITHFULL She evidently made a great impression
Of course nothing could ever— Still, in these democratic days, I suppose— She hasn't said anything to *you*?

JENNIFER She told me not to be vulgar when I hinted that—

MRS FAITHFULL (*stiffly*) There is a vulgar way and another way, no doubt, of making these enquiries

JENNIFER (*cheerfully*) Yes, mine was the vulgar way
(*With an air*) But, after all, are we not women? The moment they meet, shall we not know if "soft eyes look love to eyes which speak again"?

MRS FAITHFULL Oh, one always knows, of course

JENNIFER (*romantically*)

"And she was only seventeen,
Nor child, nor woman, but between—
And oh! the love light in her een!"

But if the light be not there, I shall wish *Imogen* luck, and I don't care how vulgar anybody calls me

MRS FAITHFULL (*deprecating, but pleased*) Oh, *Imogen* is only a baby

JENNIFER As old as Angela

MRS FAITHFULL (*firmly*) Not in the sight of Heaven

JENNIFER (*to herself*) That will be another thing to ask about when I get there. (*To MRS FAITHFULL*) Of course we must remember that the Prince's prospects are not necessarily confined to Wych Trentham. He may decide to marry *out* of the village

(DR AINSLIE is at the door. At 50 he has a sense of humour which the ladies call "so satirical", and, in his own words, he can "stand anything but shams," by which he means Religion, Royalty and other politenesses much esteemed in Wych Trentham. Some people call him a cynic, without quite knowing what it means, and they all say that "it is a great pity he never married.")

AINSLIE Do I come in, or do I go to the front door and get announced in style?

JENNIFER Which do you generally do?

AINSLIE (*sarcastically*) I don't generally have the honour of meeting a Prince. Good-evening, Mrs Faithfull.

MRS FAITHFULL (*coldly*) Good-evening.

AINSLIE Outwardly calm, but with beating hearts, and murmuring a few French phrases to ourselves, we await the arrival of His Highness.

MRS FAITHFULL (*to JENNIFER*) Is Imogen outside, dear? I think I'll go to her.

AINSLIE (*making way for her*) She is the one in pink. (MRS FAITHFULL goes out haughtily.) That woman doesn't like me.

JENNIFER (*consolingly*) But the next doctor is a long way off.

AINSLIE Oh, professionally, I have no anxiety. But she doesn't like me. Do you know why?

JENNIFER Your diffident manner?

AINSLIE I told her that she was binging Imogen up badly.

JENNIFER Speaking as a doctor, or as a—bachelor?

AINSLIE As a substitute for the Vicar. (*Indicating the drinks*) Are these for me?

JENNIFER Some of them. (*He goes to the table, and holds up one*) No, thank you.

AINSLIE (*drinking*) I said "You are robbing Imogen of her youth." Look at all the other jolly little girls you see about. They drink, and they smoke, and they swear, and they read improper books, and they're very clever and cynical, and we say, "Bless their dear little hearts! Youth, youth! I was as young as that once." I tell you, Jennifer, it brings tears into my eyes sometimes, to see them so young and so pleased with themselves, and

to think that they will have to grow up But Imogen will marry and settle down before she has had any youth at all

JENNIFER (*smiling*) I fancy that Imogen is deeper than you think When she is away from her mother—

AINSLIE Deep ' But that's what I'm saying ' She's as deep as you or I She has no business to be deep at her age Deep ' She's probably romantic, and all sorts of nice elderly things like that I daresay she's told herself stories about this ridiculous Prince of yours Just as you have (*He drinks and says firmly*) I don't know about anybody else, but I do not propose to call him "S1 "

JENNIFER " Nobody asked you, Sir, she said Sir she said " Sir, *she* said—unlike the doctor of Wych Trentham

AINSLIE And I shall talk English

JENNIFER (*disappointedly*) Oh ' Couldn't you say a few words in medical Latin now and then ?

AINSLIE That reminds me Is there an Established Church in Neo-Slavonia ?

JENNIFER Good gracious, what a question to ask a lone widow woman suddenly !

AINSLIE It's a new country, so it may still be free from the shackles of ecclesiasticism

JENNIFER Will this be the general trend of the conversation this evening ? Because, if so, I should like to go back for my cigarette cards

AINSLIE (*warming to it*) No country with an Established Church has any claim to be considered civilised But the fools won't see it

JENNIFER (*soothingly*) They never do, do they ? I don't believe they try (*Very soothingly*) Shall I put your glass down for you, or hold your hobby-horse while you dismount ?

AINSLIE (*with a laugh*) All right, I'll spare you the rest. (*He pats her hand affectionately*)

[ANGELA comes down, dressed at last.

ANGELA Hallo !

AINSLIE (*shaking hands*) Good-evening Produce your Prince

ANGELA Isn't he here ?

AINSLIE He's looking for the red carpet Have got a red carpet ? I came in through the garden village band ought to be playing the Neo-Slavo-National Anthem Why isn't it ? This party is being run very badly

(BATTERSBY comes down from his bedroom, as others return from the garden)

BATTERSBY Hallo, Doctor *(He beckons him on side)* I say, we're a cigar short You'd rather have pipe, wouldn't you ?

AINSLIE Even if I wouldn't, I should smoke it to me as an assertion of my Republican principles

BATTERSBY Excellent Could you also assert your medical principles, and tell Holt that any one of the big cigars on the top of the box would undoubtedly be fatal to him ?

AINSLIE Do I speak as one who knows Holt's constitution, or as one who knows the cigars ?

BATTERSBY I don't mind which way you put it, as long as you frighten him

(ANGELA and JENNIFER have been greeting the others. AINSLIE now joins them)

ANGELA Well, we may as well sit down I don't know how long he's going to be *(To MRS FAITHFULL)* Come along

(They sit on the sofa together. ETHEL and IMODILE assisted by the men, find seats. JENNIFER stands by the open door, where she is joined by BATTERSBY)

MRS FAITHFULL He's driving over, I suppose

ANGELA I suppose so

(There is an awkward silence)

ETHEL *(breaking it)* One, two, three I was counting, making sure we weren't going to be thirteen

AINSLIE Why ? *(To ANGELA)* Have you got only two plates ?

ETHEL I don't care what you say, Dr Ainslie, there's something in it.

AINSLIE Folly

ROBERT *(seriously)* I've known some funny things happen, Ainslie In the war

AINSLIE Even in a war nothing would happen which could be so funny as the superstitious man's Theory of the Universe Particularly if he also professed to be a religious man

ANGELA Well, nothing funny is going to happen to-night, because we're only ten

MRS FAITHFULL (*looking round the room*) Ten ?

ANGELA There's a sort of secretary person coming with him Name of Oliver

MRS FAITHFULL Oh ! Hasn't he any other name ?

ANGELA James

MRS FAITHFULL (*at a loss*) Oh !

AINSLIE J Oliver or O James ? Or doesn't he mind ?

ANGELA J Oliver He's driving him over, much to the disappointment of the cook, who hoped for a real chauffeur

AINSLIE With the latest royal scandal to communicate
(*There is another awkward silence*)

ETHEL (*breaking it*) Mr Oliver's a soldier, I suppose
(*To ROBERT*) I wonder if you'll know him

ROBERT There was an Oliver in the Middlesex Regiment—Second Battalion

(*Another silence But ETHEL is determined to make the party go*)

ETHEL Was he nice ?

ROBERT Oh, all right I hardly knew him

(*Silence*)

ETHEL (*trying again*) I wonder if that's the one

ROBERT Hardly likely, I should think

(*Silence*)

ETHEL (*a last effort*) Oh, I don't know, he might be

(*The conversation, which never promised much, has now abandoned hope There is another long silence*)

MRS FAITHFULL	}	(<i>simultaneously</i>)	{	I wonder if there's
ROBERT				any chance——
ROBERT	}	(<i>simultaneously</i>)	{	You don't know if
MRS FAITHFULL				he plays——
				I beg your pardon

(*Each waits for the other*)

ROBERT Please !

MRS FAITHFULL I was only wondering how long he was to be in the neighbourhood Did he say anything about that ?

ANGELA No

AINSLIE It depends how charming we are to-night

(Everybody waits for ROBERT)

ETHEL *(after a pause)* What were you going to say, dear ?

ROBERT Nothing I wondered if we might rope him in for the match on Saturday

ETHEL He wouldn't play cricket, would he ? It's such an English game, isn't it ?

ROBERT I just wondered He was at an English school, wasn't he ?

ANGELA I think so

ETHEL Oh ! I didn't know That makes a difference, doesn't it ?

(Another silence)

BATTERSBY *(from the window, where he has been talking to JENNIFER)* I don't believe he's coming, dear

ANGELA *(calmly)* Then he'll miss a very good dinner

AINSLIE Good !

MRS FAITHFULL *(the authority)* Naturally Royalty must arrive last

ETHEL I suppose so *(To ROBERT)* Oh, I meant to ask you, Robert, what happened when that German Prince dined in your Mess ? *(Hurriedly to the others)* Before the war, of course

JENNIFER *(at the door)* S'sh

(She takes a step into the garden They all listen)

MRS FAITHFULL I think I hear his car

JENNIFER *(looking in)* He comes !

(She disappears, but they are not noticing her All, save ANGELA, have become self-conscious There is a strained silence They feel at their clothes to make sure they are all right MRS FAITHFULL touches up IMOGEN ANGELA, at ease, is still smoking)

EMILY *(announcing)* Prince Michael Robolski, Mr Oliver

(They come in The PRINCE is a man of 40, with an upturned moustache, pleasant-looking, active)

in body and mind He speaks with a very slight foreign accent, and wears a coloured ribbon in the lapel of his coat OLIVER is a very young Englishman, smooth, round-faced, and rather obviously new to his job)

ANGELA (*getting up gracefully*) Hallo! Nice to see you again

PRINCE (*bending over her hand*) Mademoiselle! But this is delightful! May I present my good friend who takes care of me, Mr Oliver?

ANGELA (*to OLIVER*) How do you do? (*They shake hands*)

BATTERSBY (*coming forward*) Very glad to see you again, Prince Michael

PRINCE (*shaking hands with him*) But how kind of you to have me in your house

BATTERSBY (*hand out to OLIVER*) How do you do? Find the way all right?

OLIVER Oh yes, rather, thank you, sir

ANGELA (*to the PRINCE*) Now then, come along This is Mrs Faithfull

PRINCE (*holding out his hand*) Madame!

MRS FAITHFULL (*curtesying*) How do you do?

ANGELA And Miss Faithfull

MRS FAITHFULL May I present my little girl, Imogen, to Your Highness?

PRINCE (*holding out his hand, and smiling*) How do you do, Miss Imogen?

(*IMOGEN nearly swoons*)

MRS FAITHFULL Imogen, dear! I am afraid, Prince Michael, that my little girl is rather shy

PRINCE (*charmingly*) But we are all friends here, are we not?

(*He takes her hand*)

IMOGEN (*in a faint whisper*) How do you do?

(*MRS FAITHFULL administers first aid*)

ANGELA Dr Ainslie

PRINCE (*smiling*) The Champion of the Established Church?

ANGELA He's a Republican, really

AINSLIE Angela has been telling tales out of school

PRINCE (*holding out his hand*) Still we shake hands, do we not ?

AINSLIE (*shaking it, and smiling*) Without prejudice

PRINCE Oh, but perfectly (*To ANGELA*) You see, I remember what you tell me (*He comes to the HOLTS*) And this would be—you tell me of them—— The soldier with the pretty wife—— (*To ETHEL*) Pardon, madame, but she did say so And now I see for myself

ANGELA Captain and Mrs Holt

PRINCE Holt ! But of course

(*They shake hands*)

ETHEL (*blushing*) How do you do ?

ROBERT (*bravely, like a soldier*) How do you do, sir ?

(*OLIVER has been following with BATTERSBY*)

ANGELA But where's Jennifer ?

(*They all look round in bewilderment*)

PRINCE That would be Madame Boolager, the General's widow And that's all Princes are good for in these times, is it not so, Doctor ? Remembering

ANGELA Well, come and have a drink

PRINCE Mademoiselle thinks of everything (*He takes a cocktail, and looks round the room*) So this is where my friends the Battersbys live ?

ANGELA You like it ?

PRINCE How can I not like it ? It is yourselves I bow to the flowers as I come through the garden " Miss Angela, we meet again " I shake hands with the front door, and say, " Battersby, how well you are looking " (*Indicating the gallery*) Mademoiselle stands up there sometimes (*ANGELA nods*) And looks down on the little children playing below I can see her (*Raising his glass to the room*) I drink to you (*He drinks*) And Mademoiselle is here also (*To his cocktail*) How do you do, Miss Angela ? (*He picks up a second glass*) But you must drink too

EMILY (*announcing*) Mrs Bulger !

(*JENNIFER sweeps superbly in*)

JENNIFER (*to ANGELA, who comes to meet her*) Darling, I'm so sorry I'm late Do forgive me ! (*She kisses her*)

ANGELA (*smiling and releasing herself*) Come along Prince Michael, this is my friend, Jennifer

(JENNIFER'S smile changes suddenly into an expression of amazement. She stares at the PRINCE, who smiles pleasantly back at her. Then with an effort she gains control of herself.)

JENNIFER (*slowly*) How do you do, Prince Michael?

PRINCE (*with a friendly smile*) How do you do? (*He has a glass in each hand, and he looks whimsically from one to the other of them*) You will forgive me?

JENNIFER (*with a sudden laugh*) I think I'll have one too
(*He gives her one. They drink, their eyes on each other*)

EMILY Dinner is served

ACT II

The women have had their coffee in the dining-room, and now—10 30 nearly—they are all coming back together, talking as they come

PRINCE I assure you, Miss Battersby, that absence of ceremony is what most I like I should have been desolated if you had deserted us

AINSLIE You get enough ceremonial, I expect

PRINCE Those wearisome Court dinners ! *(He shudders)*
So long as the women are there—charming !

JENNIFER Whoever the women are ?

(They gradually find themselves seats, instinctively grouping themselves round the PRINCE)

PRINCE Whoever the women are But when they leave us—— !

BATTERSBY Stuffy political talk, eh ?

PRINCE *(nodding)* So wearisome

ANGELA I can't stand politics at any price

PRINCE Nor I When the women are there, we talk of many things But when the men are left alone with their wine and their cigars, and one of our great statesmen move his chair next to mine, and in a low voice begin to tell me of the little dancer he has discovered—*(he makes a gesture of boredom)*—no, I, too, cannot stand politics

MRS FAITHFULL *(hastily)* Yes, I suppose dancing is as much a national pastime with you as with the Russians

PRINCE As with all nations

JENNIFER I feel that I want to ask Prince Michael a great deal about his country *(She looks meaningly at him)*
And about himself

PRINCE (*returning her look*) I am at your service, madame

JENNIFER Suppose we begin like the geography books
Chief industries Exports and imports

ETHEL (*brightly*) They always asked that, didn't they ?

PRINCE Since the Peace Conference our chief industry
has been fighting

ROBERT (*nodding professionally*) Ah ! Quite so, sir

PRINCE A European War is an impossibility just now.
The big countries dislike each other so much that there are
no Allies, and without Allies, how can you have a really
good war ? So we little countries—how do you say ?—
keep the pot boiling Our season opens in March If we
declare war first, we export soldiers If the enemy declares
war first, we import them At the close of the season, in
October, we export journalists, and import Boundary
Commissioners

MRS FAITHFULL Most interesting Your literature, of
course, we are all getting to know

PRINCE (*pleased*) Indeed ? Our famous poet-dramatist,
Tushkin—you read him ?

MRS FAITHFULL Naturally

(*There is a general murmur of assent*)

PRINCE (*looking at them admiringly*) So you all know
him ? Excellent

BATTERSBY Is he popular in your country ?

PRINCE He is considered highly immoral

MRS FAITHFULL (*unhappily*) Oh ! I should hardly—

AINSLIE In this country immoral plays are only allowed
on Sundays

PRINCE Oh ? In that case Tushkin would certainly be
limited to Easter Sunday

MRS FAITHFULL (*hastily*) Really, really, really ! (*To*
IMOGEN) What is it, dear ? Yes Yes, I'm sure you
could My little girl wants to ask you, Prince Michael—
is that a Neo-Slavonian order which you are wearing ?

PRINCE But certainly Our Order of the Leopard
First Class

MRS FAITHFULL Oh yes, of course

ROBERT A military order, sir ?

PRINCE A general order—according to the class, you
understand There are seven classes altogether.

ETHEL Oh yes !

PRINCE The First Class for members of the blood royal , however distinguished, or, as in my case, undistinguished (*Murmurs of dissent*) I thank you ! The Second Class for distinguished statesmen, diplomats and so forth The Third Class for those eminent in war Our famous Generals

ROBERT And Admirals Quite so, s'i

PRINCE It is, I assure you, not so much lack of gallantry as lack of a coast-line which prevents us from having equally famous Admirals

ROBERT (*red*) Of course I was forgetting

PRINCE The Fourth Class is for our Bankers, our Financial Geniuses, our great employers of Labour You Mr Harrod would be a Leopard of the Fourth Class Our Fifth Class for the professional men who have achieved eminence—lawyers, doctors and the like And the Sixth Class for the men of science *Voila !*

MRS FAITHFULL But you said seven classes, Prince Michael

PRINCE (*carelessly*) Oh, the Seventh Class is just for writers, painters and composers I had forgotten them

MRS FAITHFULL Oh, yes !

IMOGEN (*nervously*) Ma—may——

MRS FAITHFULL S'sh, dear !

PRINCE You were saying, Miss Imogen ?

MRS FAITHFULL How kind of you, Prince Michael ! You wanted to ask the Prince, dear ?

IMOGEN (*with a rush*) Wh—which is the top class ?

MRS FAITHFULL (*pained*) Really !

PRINCE The artists last, as in England We are great admirers of the English

AINSLIE You don't follow us in having an Established Church, I hope ?

PRINCE (*laughing*) Ah, that Established Church !

(*They all laugh*)

JENNIFER (*suddenly*) He shan't be laughed at ! Well, Prince Michael ?

PRINCE In Neo-Slavonia we have what you would call a "good form" church, just as you have here, but it has no authority—except, no doubt, with Heaven

AINSLIE Good !

JENNIFER So you are great admirers of the English, Prince Michael ?

PRINCE Who is not ?

BATTERSBY A good many, I'm afraid

PRINCE That air of—how shall I describe it ?

ROBERT (*coughing*) I am an Englishman—take it or leave it

PRINCE Excellent, excellent !

ETHEL (*approachfully*) Robert !

PRINCE That is how England goes about the world. No wonder she is loved And America, she says, "I am an American—gee ! isn't that great ?" And France, the most insular country in the world, France says, '*Moi, je suis français—pardon !*'"

JENNIFER And the Neo-Slavonian ?

PRINCE He says, "I talk about myself too much" (*He makes a movement as if to get up*)

ANGELA (*getting up*) Let's go into the garden, shall we ? (*To PRINCE*) Or would you rather play Bridge ?

PRINCE I can play Bridge anywhere (*Looking at JENNIFER*) Only here can I talk to your friends (*He looks at ANGELA, who smiles and understands*)

ANGELA (*to MRS FAITHFULL*) Come along, then
(*They lead the way*)

ETHEL (*to IMOGEN*) Are you coming, dear ?

(*They go out together The men wait for JENNIFER*)

JENNIFER Don't wait for me I have a shawl upstairs.
(*She moves slowly as if to get it*)

BATTERSBY Right

PRINCE May I not wait, madame ?

JENNIFER But how kind of you, Prince Michael !

BATTERSBY That's right, Prince Michael Bring her along (*He shepherds the others out*)

(*JENNIFER, three stairs up, and the PRINCE, in the middle of the room, stand waiting until the others can no longer be heard*)

PRINCE (*moving towards it*) Shall I close the door ?

JENNIFER (*mockingly*) As Your Highness pleases
(*He smiles, and comes back*)

JENNIFER comes down the stairs, and stands two or three yards away, looking at him)

JENNIFER Well, Michael ?

PRINCE (*smiling*) Well, Jennifer ? (*He has no foreign accent now*)

JENNIFER So you've come back to me at last

PRINCE Yes

JENNIFER Four years, isn't it ?

PRINCE About that

JENNIFER You're getting on in the world

PRINCE Aren't I ?

JENNIFER Fancy ! A real Prince !

PRINCE But of a very small country

JENNIFER When I last saw you, you were plain Michael Brown of Hammersmith

PRINCE (*nodding*) Yes And you were beautiful Mrs. Michael Brown of West Kensington

JENNIFER (*laughing*) Oh, Michael, what am I going to do about you ? May I sit down, Your Highness ?

PRINCE (*arranging a chair for her*) The wife always takes the husband's rank and precedence Your chair, Princess

JENNIFER (*sitting down*) I thought perhaps ours was a morganatic marriage

PRINCE There are no morganatic marriages in Neo-Slavonia

JENNIFER Ah, now tell me I've been longing to ask you all the evening—only it sounded so absurd Is there such a country as Neo-Slavonia ?

PRINCE (*shocked*) Good heavens, no ! You don't suggest that I'm a common impostor, do you ?

JENNIFER I wondered Aren't you ?

PRINCE (*with dignity*) Certainly not

JENNIFER I'm glad

PRINCE Besides, where would be the fun ? I'm an inventor

JENNIFER I see

PRINCE I invented the small buffer-state of Neo-Slavonia I invented all of it Its name, its people, its customs, its orders and its literature I then gave myself the title of Prince in that country Who but I had the right to bestow that title ? Whom more worthy of it than myself could I find ?

JENNIFER (*nodding*) Prince Michael Robulski

MICHAEL Robolski In Neo-Slavonia the termination
“-ulski” is now obsolete

JENNIFER I must try to remember

PRINCE It's a jolly little country You must let me
show it to you one day

JENNIFER Thank you But would it be quite proper for
us to go about together ?

PRINCE Proper ?

JENNIFER The late General James Bulger—C B—was
very old-fashioned I don't think he would like his widow
—— How do they regard these things in your country ?

PRINCE Ah, now tell me I have been longing to ask
you all the evening—only it sounded so absurd Was there
ever a General James Bulger—C B ?

JENNIFER (*shocked*) Good heavens, no ! You don't
suggest that I'm a common bigamist, do you ?

PRINCE I wondered Aren't you ?

JENNIFER (*with dignity*) Certainly not

PRINCE I'm glad

JENNIFER Besides, where would be the fun ? I'm an
inventor

PRINCE I see

JENNIFER I invented a big, red-faced soldier called Bulger
I invented all of him I invented his rank and his orders,
and his medals I then married him Who but I had any
right to consider myself his wife ?

PRINCE True You know, I had an uneasy feeling——

JENNIFER That I had married *again* ?

PRINCE Well, you might have thought I was dead

JENNIFER (*sweetly*) Even that mightn't make me want a
second husband

PRINCE (*acknowledging the hit*) I suppose not Then
why drag in Bulger ?

JENNIFER (*after a little silence*) Michael !

PRINCE Yes ?

JENNIFER Did you ever wonder what had happened to
me after you left me so suddenly ?

PRINCE Often

JENNIFER You remembered that you *had* got a wife
somewhere ?

PRINCE Of course Did you ever wonder what had happened to me ?

JENNIFER (*carelessly*) Sometimes

PRINCE You had your own money, so I knew you wouldn't starve

JENNIFER (*nodding*) And eating is the great thing in life, isn't it ?

PRINCE (*lightly*) I've thought so once or twice in the last four years

JENNIFER (*thoughtfully*) I don't know how it is, but if people ask after your husband, and you say, "Oh, he left me a year or two ago, I don't know why, we were rather on edge after the war, and he couldn't find a job, and I suppose he suddenly got sick of me," it never sounds—I don't know how it is, but it never—Well, you know, Michael, I thought I could think of something more respectable than that So when I came down here, where nobody knew me, I announced that my husband had left me for the only reason which a loving, dutiful, high-minded husband such as yourself, could have for leaving a loving, dutiful, delightful wife—such as me He had died

PRINCE (*nodding*) And by the terms of the will which he made on his death-bed, had changed his name to Bulger

JENNIFER (*smiling*) Well—that——! You see, I wanted him to be a soldier

PRINCE Good Heavens, hadn't you had enough of soldiers ? Wasn't I one for four years, if it comes to that ?

JENNIFER Oh, my dear, not one of those rough, amateur, *fighting* soldiers ! A real peace-time soldier ! All clean, and in a nice red coat, and covered with medals ! A professional soldier !

PRINCE The sort to whom we give the Order of the Leopard, Third Class, in Neo-Slavonia ?

JENNIFER Exactly ! A soldier A General A C B It's very respectable to be a General's widow

PRINCE But you can be a General without being called James Bulger In Neo-Slavonia—— I beg your pardon, I keep forgetting But I'm sure that you can be a General without being called James Bulger

JENNIFER (*eagerly*) Not as I saw him Not this one General James Bulger, C B Can't you see him ?

PRINCE (*nodding*) I can hear him!

JENNIFER You don't know what a comfort the thought of him has been. In many a difficulty I have asked myself, "Now, what would the General have said?"—and then I've remembered, "Not in front of the Vicar!"

PRINCE A fine soldier! One of the old breed. My only objection to him is that he had no business to go handing his name about like that.

JENNIFER But the name has been a great comfort too (*Shyly*). You may have noticed that I have become a little—a little—— Or have I not?

PRINCE (*emphatically*) Not a day!

JENNIFER I wasn't referring to days so much.

PRINCE (*emphatically*) Not an inch!

JENNIFER (*excitedly*) Really? Michael! How Neo-Slavonia has improved you! But to English eyes there does seem to be a—— a tendency—— Well, the name has been a great help. Because when people are told, "I want you to come and meet my dear friend Mrs. Bulger," they come expecting the worst, and when they see me, they say—(*imitating them*)—"Oh, but how—I didn't—I had no idea!"—and any little—tendency—becomes an added charm, as though, in my kindly way, I were humouring the name. Do you understand?

PRINCE Perfectly.

JENNIFER And another advantage of it is that it makes them all call me Jennifer so quickly. I like that. I'm a friendly soul.

PRINCE The men too?

JENNIFER (*sweetly*) Why not?

PRINCE I am thinking of the General. You remember how old-fashioned he was. I don't think *he* would have liked it.

JENNIFER Why, his last words were, "Jennifer, Jennifer!"

PRINCE One doesn't want one's last words broadcast. What did he die of, by the way?

JENNIFER One of those Indian frontier skirmishes.

PRINCE What was a real General doing, getting mixed up dangerously in one of those?

JENNIFER It wasn't in the danger-zone. At least, not officially. (*In a whisper, after a glance to see that they are*

alone) A soda-water bottle burst just as he was opening it (*In her natural voice*) I always call it "a stray bullet"

PRINCE (*smiling*) You've been taking a risk, haven't you? Who's that heavy fellow who's here to-night——

JENNIFER Captain Holt?

PRINCE He must have been in India. He might make inquiries—I daresay he reads back numbers of the Army List on Sunday afternoons.

JENNIFER Well, but it was all settled before he came. Anyway, I don't see why he should doubt me. He hasn't got a suspicious nature like yours.

PRINCE If you had consulted *me*, I should have recommended a nice quiet death near Woking.

JENNIFER (*shaking her head*) No. That wouldn't have done. You see, at first—just at first—I didn't want—— You see, I thought my husband might come back to me. So I didn't want to be too definite about his death. I wanted to leave a loophole of explanation. He had been left for dead, captured by the advancing enemy, escaped, lost his memory, perhaps. So that if he *had* turned up one day—— (*She pauses*)

PRINCE Yes?

JENNIFER (*gaily*) Then I shouldn't have seemed quite such an impostor.

PRINCE Inventor.

JENNIFER (*agreeing*) Inventor.

PRINCE (*after a pause*) And now, after four years, he *has* come back?

JENNIFER (*surprised*) Who?

PRINCE Your husband.

JENNIFER Good gracious, no! Prince Michael Rob—— No, don't tell me. That's the obsolete one—Prince Michael Robolski of Neo-Slavonia, wishing to renew his acquaintance and—(*smiling sweetly*)—shall I say "further his suit"?—with the charming Miss Angela Battersby, is paying a short, a *very* short visit, to Wych Trentham.

PRINCE I don't see why *very* short.

JENNIFER Well, you see, my dear Prince, at any moment I may discover the exact position on the map of Neo-Slavonia.

PRINCE Yes, but why this passion for accurate geography suddenly ?

JENNIFER Because I am fond of Angela Battersby And I won't let you make a fool of her

PRINCE Ah, now I do see your point But I think that, however short my visit, I should feel it my duty—the Neo-Slavonians are notoriously a polite race—to say good-bye to —Captain Holt

JENNIFER (*thoughtfully*) Oh !

PRINCE I have taken a sudden liking to the studious Captain I can't let you make a fool of him

JENNIFER (*smiling*) Yes, I see your point too I'm afraid, Michael, we're both impostors

PRINCE Not impostors inventors, creators I wish you would see the difference We have given an idea to the world At least I have To the people I meet, Neo-Slavonia is now as much a real country as Jugo-Slavia or Lithuania Well, that's my doing

JENNIFER I see And when did the great idea come to you ?

PRINCE (*smiling reflectively*) It was forced on me Really it wasn't my fault It was at Monte Carlo

JENNIFER (*interested*) Where you were looking for work ?

PRINCE I'd given up looking for work I'd had enough of that in England after the war I was looking for money Much more fun

JENNIFER I've been told that there's quite a lot in Monte Carlo Any luck ?

PRINCE Fairish Well, you know what the South of France is like Stiff with potty Royalties from God knows where (*With a sudden laugh*) I say, it is funny to be talking English again, I mean the real English that the English talk Well, I was lunching with some people I'd never met before, as you do out there, and rather a stupid girl, trying to make conversation, and feeling round for my name, asked me what I did I said I didn't do anything, and she said, "I suppose you're a Prince" And I said, "Yes, yes"—just as you'd say, "Yes, yes," if anybody asked you in the Temple if you were a barrister, and you weren't really listening

JENNIFER That wasn't Angela ?

PRINCE Oh no, Miss Battersby was much later, when I was generally accepted as a Prince. It was surprising how quickly I was committed to it (*Proudly*). Of course, as soon as I saw how things were going, I insisted on the Neo-Slavonia. I wasn't going to be an ordinary impostor.

JENNIFER And did nobody know that there wasn't such a place?

PRINCE Nobody. You see, I looked at it this way. At the Peace Conference there was nothing to prevent the Big Four creating a new buffer-state called Neo-Slavonia. Was there?

JENNIFER No.

PRINCE Well, now, if they *had* created it, it was certain that one or two of them wouldn't have known where it was.

JENNIFER Absolutely.

PRINCE So I thought, "If they wouldn't know, I don't see why anybody else should want to." You see what I mean?

JENNIFER Perfectly.

PRINCE Of course, I worked up the local colour gradually. At one time it was a very neat thing whether it had a sea-coast or not, but I felt it was rather dangerous. What do you think?

JENNIFER (*gravely*) Oh yes, I think a sea-coast would have been rather dangerous.

PRINCE Of course, we have a certain amount of local water-borne traffic on the—the Danube. I fancy it's the Danube.

JENNIFER Oh, Michael, you ought to know that!

PRINCE I find it easier to remember when I am using a slight Neo-Slavonian accent. Plain Michael Brown was never much good at geography.

JENNIFER Nor so popular, I suppose.

PRINCE Oh, no. You get a very good time as a Prince. There's a lot of hospitality going about.

JENNIFER And a lot of crudulity, too.

PRINCE (*smiling*) Yes, fellow-inventor, there is. If you say anything dogmatically enough, the other man is always a little doubtful of himself. You'd be sur-

prised how many literary authorities—critics and such like—have agreed with me in thinking that Tushkin should have been given the Nobel prize instead of his more popular fellow-countryman, Gregorovitch. I'll lay a thousand to eight that there's not one person in the world who could give you a complete list of the Nobel prize-winners. My own theory is that every other year they invent the name and stick to the money.

JENNIFER (*shaking her head at him*) Oh, Michael! And did none of that hospitality lodge in your throat?

PRINCE My dear Jennifer, why should it? If I got fifteen shillings worth of food and drink, didn't I give fifteen shillings worth of entertainment in return for it? Ask your friends which they prefer—a dinner where they'll meet a fifteen-shilling Prince, or a dinner where they'll have to listen to a hundred-guinea violinist. They'd vote for me every time. The professional Prince.

JENNIFER And that's how you've been living lately?

PRINCE Well, I've had tips, you know.

JENNIFER (*interested*) Ten-franc notes under the napkin?

PRINCE Not quite so crude as that. Tips about stocks and horses.

JENNIFER Oh, I see.

PRINCE If you are high enough up, and supposed not to want it, you can always get plenty of help in making money. I've done pretty well this last year. In fact, almost well enough to be able to afford to look for work again.

JENNIFER Then, on the whole, we needn't have been too anxious about each other?

PRINCE We needn't. You've had your income to yourself, and lived beautifully in the country, and I've had my freedom, and lived——

JENNIFER Like a Prince——

PRINCE Like a man, anyway, in the open world. And the bickerings of Hammersmith are gone for ever.

JENNIFER (*after a pause*) And now what?

PRINCE Well, what?

JENNIFER Is it Your Highness's pleasure to come back to me?

PRINCE Good heavens, no!

(JENNIFER looks surprised)

JENNIFER Oh ! I just wanted to know

PRINCE (*smiling*) I can only come back if General Bulger's widow invites me

JENNIFER (*laughing*) My dear Michael ! if I invite you ! Oh, my dear Michael ! (*She is laughing again*)

PRINCE (*undisturbed*) You laugh as adorably as ever

JENNIFER Bless the man, now he's going to make love to me !

PRINCE To a Neo-Slavonian what more delightful way of spending an evening ?

JENNIFER Well, I'd sooner you did it to me than to Angela I won't have any of that, I warn you, Michael

PRINCE (*shaking a finger at her*) Oh, Mrs Bulger, Mrs Bulger, think of your flirtations at—Simla, was it ?

JENNIFER You come to England at the risk of being exposed as an imposter——

PRINCE An inventor

JENNIFER ——just so as to get another glimpse of her Was that necessary ? I say again, I am fond of Angela

PRINCE And she is fond of Jennifer

JENNIFER In her non-committal way, I think so

PRINCE (*becoming very foreign suddenly*) Ah, this angel, this Angela ! She is not so non-committal away from your English fogs She expand ! She talk ! She speak to me of her friends She speak much of her great friend, Jennifer Jennifer ? I say Jennifer ? What a beautiful name ! Tell me of this lady with the so beautiful name ! She tell me It is Madame Boulager Boulager—one of your great English families I am intrigued I am—how do you say it ?—agog Tell me of this Madame Boulager, I say Your Angela tell me But it is not until she say one thing that I know for certain who Madame Boulager is

JENNIFER (*clapping her hands eagerly*) Go on, what did she say about me ?

PRINCE She said, "Jennifer goes about as if she is singing to herself, 'Isn't it fun being Jennifer ?'" Then I knew And I said suddenly, but in our Neo-Slavonian tongue, so that I didn't give myself away—(*he appears to be clearing his throat and sneezing simultaneously*)—which means, "By Jove ! It's my Jenny !"

JENNIFER (*carried away*) Oh, Michael! And was it? I mean—go on.

PRINCE That's all I came, I saw, I was re-conquered. (*Holding out his hand*) How do you do, Mrs Brown?

(*You could see that JENNIFER was a little touched by this recital, but the prodigal is not going to be welcomed home so quickly as he thinks. He may have been a Prince in Monte Carlo, but he is not going to have his own way so easily in England*)

JENNIFER (*drawing her hand away*) Michael, I don't know what to think about you—but I think you had better go back to Neo-Slavonia . . . or where you will

PRINCE Must I?

JENNIFER Well, obviously you can't stay here

PRINCE Why not?

JENNIFER What as? Prince Michael? My first husband? My future husband? Ridiculous. It's much too difficult

PRINCE (*eagerly*) Never mind the difficulties. I can manage that all right. That's where the fun comes in. If you want me to stay, I stay.

JENNIFER (*laughing at his assurance*) If I want you to? Why should I want you to?

(*No Prince could stand that laughter from a woman*)

PRINCE (*quickly*) If I decide to stay, I stay.

JENNIFER (*sparkling*) Is that a threat?

PRINCE A statement.

JENNIFER (*dangerously*) Take care, Michael.

PRINCE (*equally dangerously*) Take care, Jennifer.

JENNIFER If you challenge me, I take it up.

PRINCE Shall I give you the same warning? (*With a sudden smile*) Or shall I just say, "What do you want me to do?"

JENNIFER Whatever you please, except stay here, where you will do nobody any good.

PRINCE And if I disobey?

JENNIFER Then, very reluctantly, I shall explain to my friends the exact position on the map of Europe of Neo-Slavonia.

PRINCE And the exact position on the map of Asia of General Bulger's body?

JENNIFER It necessary (*She smiles sweetly at him*) My friends will not be hard on me when they hear that my husband was a scamp of whose name and identity I did not wish to be reminded

PRINCE (*approvingly*) Yes, that's a good card to play Well done, Jennifer (*Smiling*) But I also—I play cards

JENNIFER Play them in Monte Carlo It's safer

PRINCE You are afraid that I have too many hearts in my hand ?

JENNIFER (*laughing, but a little nervously*) Not mine, my dear Michael

PRINCE (*nodding*) Not the Queen Well, we shall see Your orders are that I go back to London to-morrow—and then, if I please, to the devil

JENNIFER (*quickly*) No, no, Michael, I didn't say that

PRINCE On my way to London to-morrow, is it permitted that I look in here just to say good-bye to my hostess ?

JENNIFER You can say good-bye to-night

PRINCE In Neo-Slavonia—— (*JENNIFER laughs, and he waits for her to finish*)

JENNIFER I beg your pardon

PRINCE (*unperturbed*) In Neo-Slavonia, we have a custom that, on the morning after hospitality, one pays a formal visit to one's hostess in order to render thanks Is it permitted ?

JENNIFER (*reluctantly*) Well, if you must You can have till twelve to-morrow After that, if you are still here——

PRINCE (*boyishly*) Say “Noon to-morrow” It sounds more thrilling, and it avoids misapprehension

JENNIFER (*laughing*) Noon, then But I mean it

PRINCE (*nodding*) I shall be ready for you (*Carelessly*) I have till noon, then If I don't see you again alone—good-bye, Jennifer

JENNIFER (*half tender, half amused, wondering what he is up to*) Good-bye, Michael (*She holds out her hand, but he is not looking*)

PRINCE Just do something for me, will you ?

JENNIFER (*eagerly*) Yes

PRINCE (*casually*) Tell young Oliver—he's outside somewhere—that I want him. He will have to see about the car—and I shall have other arrangements to make. Good-bye.

JENNIFER (*after waiting a moment for some sign from him*)
Good-bye. [She goes out]

(Left alone, the PRINCE looks at his watch. Then he lights a cigarette and walks up and down thinking. OLIVER comes in.)

OLIVER You wanted me, sir?

(The PRINCE nods, and looks at him for a little without speaking.)

PRINCE The time has come for us to part, Oliver.

OLIVER (*anxiously*) Aren't you satisfied with me, sir?

PRINCE Entirely satisfied. You write my letters, you drive my car, you order my breakfast, and all the time you look—how do you say it?—as innocent as a baby. But it was a temporary engagement, was it not?

OLIVER Yes, sir. I quite understood that. But there is another three weeks to go.

PRINCE I engage you for the month, I give you the month's salary. It is enough. Now I ask you to do one little thing more for me—and then my orders are that you go back to your Cornwall, is it, and have three weeks holiday. Is that understood?

OLIVER Yes, sir. It's very kind of you.

PRINCE This is the last thing. I want you to go now, quietly—can you get your hat and coat without seeing anybody?—

OLIVER I expect so, sir.

PRINCE I will say your adieux for you. Go very quietly, take the car, drive back to—what is it?

OLIVER Medenham.

PRINCE To the hotel, yes. Stay the night there yourself—pay my bill in the morning—how much?—and then go off to Cornwall.

OLIVER (*reckoning it on his fingers*) Four pound ten, sir, would see it easily.

PRINCE (*giving him a note*) Give the change to anybody you like. That is all. You understand?

OLIVER Yes, sir. Are you staying here, sir?

PRINCE (*smiling*) That we shall see (*Holding out his hand*) Good-bye

OLIVER (*shaking it*) Good-bye, sir (*Awkwardly*) I'm sorry that you—— If ever another time you should want—— I mean, I owe you three weeks——

PRINCE (*hurrying him out*) I will remember

OLIVER I'm afraid I feel rather a fraud, sir

PRINCE (*with a last push*) I, too, Oliver Good luck to you

(*OLIVER goes And only just in time, for ANGELA comes in from the garden*)

ANGELA Well ?

PRINCE Miss Battersby, I could kiss your hand for the delightful evening I have had, were it not that——

ANGELA (*amused*) What ?

PRINCE That I would rather shake it in your English way

ANGELA (*holding out her hand*) Just as you like

PRINCE (*pressing it*) I thank you She is adorable

ANGELA Jennifer ? I knew you'd like her

PRINCE (*romantically*) I love her

ANGELA (*carelessly*) I did tell you she was a widow ?

PRINCE The widow of a gallant General in your army
She tell me herself

ANGELA She has a little money of her own

PRINCE (*promptly*) Five hundred a year She tell me her—— (*Hastily*) I mean, I guess it

ANGELA About that, I suppose I can't do it into— marks, is it, in your country ?

PRINCE (*smiling*) Mademoiselle, I perceive that you are a match-maker But it would not be necessary to do it into marks Did I marry, I should not go back to Neo-Slavonia

ANGELA If Jennifer married, she wouldn't leave Wych Trentham She's much too fond of it

PRINCE (*a little taken aback*) Oh ! And all your other friends, they are not likely to be leaving it ?

ANGELA Why should they ?

PRINCE There will be a match-maker one day for Mademoiselle, perhaps ?

ANGELA (*shaking her head*) I've got somebody to look after Anyway, I'm not the marrying sort

PRINCE (*smiling*) Mademoiselle, that is a challenge to

Cupid which in the whole history of the world has never yet been refused I shall dance at your wedding within a year
Do you dance at weddings in this country ?

ANGELA Oh, Lord, at everything

PRINCE Then I dance And the next year at Miss Imogen's

ANGELA Oh, Imogen, yes

PRINCE (*thinking*) Miss Imogen So dead when Madame her mother is there, so alive when she is alone

ANGELA (*surprised*) I didn't know you'd seen her alone ?

PRINCE I know the type It would be amusing to see if I am right Is it permitted ?

ANGELA Permitted ? It has been waited for all evening
(*Going to the door*) I'll send her

[*She goes out*]

PRINCE Mademoiselle is too kind

(*As soon as he is alone he feels in his pocket, and brings out a bunch of letters, and a note-case He selects a letter and some notes, and goes to the desk, where he puts them into an envelope which he addresses to himself IMOGEN comes in accompanied as far as the door by her mother*)

MRS FAITHFULL (*giving her the last touches*) There !
Perhaps just a little—— Yes (*In a whisper*) "Your Highness" at first, and then "Prince Michael" (*She vanishes*)

IMOGEN (*coming in*) Hallo !

PRINCE (*getting up hastily*) Miss Imogen ! How kind of you !

IMOGEN I say, do you know, I must tell you, before you came I said I didn't believe you were a real Prince at all Wasn't it cheek ?

PRINCE It was very natural, Mademoiselle

IMOGEN I say, you're not really going to-night, and never coming back again, are you ?

PRINCE It depends to some extent on yourself, Miss Imogen

IMOGEN (*giggling*) I say ! Oughtn't you to kiss my hand when you say things like that ?

PRINCE (*taking her hand*) Will you do something for me ?

IMOGEN Rather ! Anything ! (*He kisses her hand*)

Oo ! Could it be something really wicked, so that I can tell Mother afterwards that it saw the Prince who asked me to do it ? (*Giggling*) Oh, think of Mother's face !

PRINCE Alas, it is not really wicked

IMOGEN (*dashed*) Oh !

PRINCE (*quickly*) But it is a secret Between you and me For evermore !

IMOGEN Oo, that's all right ! What is it ?

PRINCE This is a very great secret I cannot even explain to *you* what it means Not yet You must take me on trust

IMOGEN (*remembering that last novel*) To the death, Prince Michael

PRINCE (*touched*) You dear ! (*He holds up the letter*) I want this letter delivered here to-morrow morning At five minutes to twelve It is addressed to myself Can you give it to one of your village boys to-morrow to bring up to the house ?

IMOGEN Rather !

PRINCE If he is asked where it comes from, he is to say that a gentleman gave it to him

IMOGEN (*eagerly*) Righto I understand

PRINCE At five minutes to twelve exactly You will give him something ? (*He takes out a handful of money and selects half-a-crown*)

IMOGEN (*laughing*) Oo, I say ! Half-a-crown ! He'd suspect something at once Sixpence

PRINCE You are a better conspirator than I Sixpence (*He gives it and the letter to her*)

IMOGEN 'Kyou (*She puts the letter down her dress in the approved manner See Chapter XIV*)

PRINCE In return, I give you the highest reward your country has to offer "Imogen, you're a sportsman" (*He holds out his hand. IMOGEN takes it, and is completely carried away*)

IMOGEN My Prince ! (*All funny suddenly*) Oo, I say, I believe I'm going to cry (*Winking to keep the tears back*) A hanky, quick ! (*He gives his to her She blows her nose loudly, and dabs at her eyes*)

PRINCE Better ?

IMOGEN (*nodding*) 'M I say, I've ruined your hanky

I'll have to send it on to you You'll tell me where, won't you ?

PRINCE That's all right

IMOGEN Honestly I didn't do it just to—— (*Reluctantly*) Well, I suppose I *could* have used my own But I really was crying (*Instinctively, feeling the Presence in the neighbourhood*) Look out, here's Mother

PRINCE (*in a whisper*) Five minutes to twelve !

IMOGEN (*in a whisper*) Right

PRINCE (*aloud*) And you are fond of lawn tennis ?

IMOGEN Oh yes, Prince Michael !

MRS FAITHFULL *comes in*

PRINCE (*bowing*) Madame !

MRS FAITHFULL Ah, Prince Michael, how kind of you to be taking an interest in my little girl I hope she has been behaving nicely

PRINCE I give her what you call the good-conduct prize The testimonial and the lucky sixpence (*He laughs*)

MRS FAITHFULL (*extremely amused*) How delightful ! We shall always remember, shan't we, Imogen ? (IMOGEN *nods shyly*) I do hope, Prince Michael, that what Mrs Bulger has been telling me is not true ?

PRINCE (*anxiously*) What she has been telling you ?

MRS FAITHFULL That you are going back to your own country, almost at once

PRINCE (*relieved*) Ah ! So she tells you that Well, it is "Perhaps" and "Perhaps not"

MRS FAITHFULL Well, that gives us a little hope, doesn't it, Imogen ?

(IMOGEN *smiles shyly*)

PRINCE My head (*touching it*) say "You'd better go" My heart (*touching it*) say "Don't go !" My soul (*feeling for it vaguely*)—where is my soul ?—My soul say "You ought to go" They are still arguing I wait for the verdict

MRS FAITHFULL (*laughing*) How amusing ! We must remember that, mustn't we, Imogen ?

PRINCE (*looking at his watch*) And my watch says, "You *must* go" But he means only "Back to your hotel"

(ANGELA and BATTERSBY, JENNIFER and the HOLTS are coming in)

ANGELA Who *must* go ?

JENNIFER All of us, dear, I expect

PRINCE It is I, Miss Angela I have a long way to go
You are all together here, at home

BATTERSBY Well, have a whisky first

ROBERT (*looking at his watch*) By jove, yes

PRINCE (*to BATTERSBY*) Thank you Now where is my
good Oliver ?

ETHEL Mr Oliver was out with all of us

BATTERSBY (*looking round the room*) That's funny
Where is Oliver ?

ROBERT He and Ainslie have gone off somewhere, I
expect (*He goes to the door*)

ANGELA Dr Ainslie has gone (*To the PRINCE*) He asked
me to make his apologies A message came for him

BATTERSBY (*bringing whisky to the PRINCE*) Thank God
I'm not a doctor Help yourself, Holt

ROBERT Thanks (*He goes to the table*) Mrs Faithfull ?

MRS FAITHFULL A little lemonade, please

PRINCE Thank you (*He takes his whisky from
BATTERSBY*)

JENNIFER (*slowly and clearly*) I sent Mr Oliver in to you
about ten minutes ago, Prince Michael

PRINCE (*amazed*) To me here ? (*His glass stops in mid-air*)

JENNIFER Yes (*She looks at him, wondering*)

PRINCE But what an extraordinary thing !

ANGELA He's probably gone to see about the car

PRINCE Ah, yes ! No doubt (*He drinks*)

BATTERSBY I'll tell him

PRINCE Pray don't trouble He will be here directly

BATTERSBY It's all right [*He is gone*]

ROBERT (*to the PRINCE*) He can call to him from the end
of the lawn, sir You left the car in the road, sir, I suppose,
sir ?

PRINCE (*anxiously*) Yes It would be safe there ?

ANGELA Oh, Lord, yes

MRS FAITHFULL We are a very unsophisticated little
colony here, Prince Michael

JENNIFER Well, we don't steal, anyway

PRINCE (*raising his glass to her*) Only hearts

(*She turns away*)

ANGELA I say, do help yourselves, all of you Isn't there any lemonade ?

PRINCE What can I get you ?

ANGELA No, thanks Jennifer ?

JENNIFER (*her eyes on the PRINCE*) No, thank you, dear

ROBERT (*to IMOGEN*) What about you, Miss Faithfull ?

MRS FAITHFULL Just a little lemonade, please

ROBERT Right (*He goes for it*)

BATTERSBY (*coming in at the door*) I say, the car isn't there !

ETHEL Not there ?

ANGELA It must be

BATTERSBY Well, it isn't

(*HOLT clicks his heels in front of the PRINCE, and goes out briskly, with the determination to see this thing through*)

JENNIFER (*looking at the PRINCE*) What an extraordinary thing !

(*He catches her eye, there is a look of understanding between them, and he turns away*)

PRINCE Your lanes are narrow He is turning round, perhaps

ETHEL Yes, that's it, I expect

BATTERSBY He wouldn't have to go as far as that I should have heard the engine

PRINCE My good Oliver, I hope nothing has happened to him

MRS FAITHFULL He has been very quiet all evening I suppose—have you had him long ?

PRINCE You think he is—how do you call it ?—a fraud.

JENNIFER Fraud, humbug, impostor—we have various words for it (*Again they exchange glances*)

PRINCE But my Oliver ! So innocent-looking !

IMOGEN (*suddenly*) Bolsheviks !

(*They all turn quickly to her, and she subsides into her lemonade*)

BATTERSBY Well, it's very odd

HOLT comes in

ROBERT The car isn't there, sir

BATTERSBY (*a little ironically*) Thank you, Holt

ANGELA Well, that's that He has run away, your Oliver

PRINCE (*smiling*) Then I walk away Is it not so ?

ANGELA Nonsense, you can't walk We can put you up

JENNIFER (*sweetly*) The Doctor could drive you to your hotel in his car

PRINCE (*with pretended eagerness*) Ah !

ANGELA He's out in it

PRINCE (*with pretended disappointment*) Oh ! (*He winks at JENNIFER*)

ANGELA Father can sleep in the studio He often does, don't you, Father ? (*She rings*)

BATTERSBY Yes, dear, yes (*To the PRINCE*) I should say, "Yes, dear, yes," in any case, of course, but it does happen to be true in this case I have a camp bed there

PRINCE You are too kind But I have never slept in a studio I should like the experience

ANGELA Father is much more——

EMILY *comes in*

PRINCE (*holding up his hand*) Please ! It will give less trouble

ANGELA Just as you like (*To EMILY*) Make up the bed in the studio for Prince Michael

EMILY Yes, miss [*She goes out*

MRS FAITHFULL We have a spare room, dear I'm sure if Prince Michael——

ETHEL So have we We should be only——

JENNIFER (*sweetly*) Captain Holt also has a motor-bicycle

PRINCE (*to HOLT*) Ah !

ROBERT Not running just now, unfortunately

PRINCE Oh ! (*Again he catches JENNIFER's eye*) Then I am afraid, dear Miss Battersby, that I must trespass——

ANGELA Of course That's settled

PRINCE (*to MRS FAITHFULL and ETHEL*) And thank you, ladies, for your great kindness I shall always remember it

JENNIFER (*suddenly*) I must be going

ANGELA Oh, must you ?

JENNIFER (*to the PRINCE*) I shall not see you again, Prince Michael——

ANGELA Oh, look in in the morning and say good-bye

JENNIFER I'm afraid the Prince will have gone before I can manage it, I shall be rather busy up till—noon
Good-bye, Prince Michael

PRINCE (*taking her hand and bowing over it*) It is always allowed one to hope I shall give myself what comfort I can by saying, "*Au revoir, Mrs Bulger*" (*He kisses her hand*)

JENNIFER (*kissing her hand to them*) Good-night, everybody (*They all say "Good-night"*) (*To ANGELA*) Good-bye darling It's been so delightful

ANGELA Good-bye

(*She and her father withdraw a little from the others, and discuss the question of pyjamas for the PRINCE*)

JENNIFER (*with a meaning eye on the PRINCE*) I shall be round about—noon

(*The PRINCE bows in understanding With a wave she is gone*)

(*The FAITHFULS and the HOLTS immediately surround the PRINCE*)

MRS FAITHFULL We shall never let you go now, Prince

ROBERT No, look here, you must stop and play on Saturday Do you bowl?

MRS FAITHFULL Our little party on Thursday—a few friends—

ETHEL (*to PRINCE*) I don't know if you're fond of fishing—

(*They have their backs to JENNIFER, who is looking through the open window The PRINCE raises his glass to her mockingly, triumphantly She shakes her fist at him, as the curtain comes down*)

ACT III

It is 11 30 next morning ANGELA is at the writing-desk, busy with a few letters IMOGEN appears noiselessly at the window She looks round the room, and then disappears again BATTERSBY comes in from the dining-room

BATTERSBY We all seem very late this morning Has the Prince had breakfast?

ANGELA I sent it round to the studio I thought he'd prefer a Continental one

BATTERSBY Probably the one thing he looked forward to was a welter of eggs and bacon You've given him quite a wrong idea of our old English customs

ANGELA He can have eggs and bacon for lunch, if he's very keen Have you seen him?

BATTERSBY I borrowed him a razor from Ainslie, and I also took him some clothes

ANGELA Clothes——I forgot about that

BATTERSBY I don't say he'll be beautiful, but he'll be decent

ANGELA You'd better send over for his bag, and find out about the Oliver man

BATTERSBY I suggested it, but he asked me to wait He's a little uncertain about his plans He said something about a letter I suppose the post has come?

ANGELA Yes

BATTERSBY (*without much hope*) Nothing for me, I suppose?

ANGELA No

BATTERSBY I thought not The number of people who sit down every morning and say "I don't think I'll write

to Battersby to-day " is positively startling There must be well over forty million of 'em in England alone

ANGELA He couldn't get a letter here anyway

BATTERSBY The Prince? I should be very much annoyed if he did It would be very disconcerting if a man who stayed here accidentally for one night got a letter, and I who have stayed here on purpose for years and years got none I suppose the paper hasn't come?

ANGELA No, not yet I'll speak to Lumley He's getting slack again

BATTERSBY There ought to be *some* method of getting in touch with the outside world How would it be to have *The Times* sent down by post every day, and then it wouldn't matter if the Lumley boy were going for a whistle in this direction, or not?

ANGELA If you like, dear

BATTERSBY Besides, it would give the postman more respect for me, if he saw my name now and then I met him in the garden yesterday as he was bringing up the letters There were three for you, two for Emily, four for cook and a seed-catalogue for James I passed it off with a careless laugh, but I could see what he was thinking (*He looks over his shoulder, and sees her writing*) Give my love to whoever it is, and say that I should dearly appreciate a post-card—

ANGELA It's Debenham and Fiecbody

BATTERSBY (*unmoved*) —from either of them

(*The PRINCE comes in He is wearing an old coat and a pair of white flannel trousers of BATTERSBY'S He has shaved off his moustache*)

PRINCE Good-morning to you What a charming day!

BATTERSBY Good-morning, Prince

ANGELA (*getting up*) Oh, good-morning I do hope you slept well, and all that?

PRINCE The bed couldn't have been more comfortable

I had forgotten that there were so many birds in the country

ANGELA We're used to them, of course

BATTERSBY But the silly things don't realise it, and go on just the same (*The PRINCE turns to him*) Hallo! I say! I hope that that razor—

PRINCE (*nodding*) It was carried away It has shaved the good doctor so often, that before I knew what had happened——

BATTERSBY We must tell Ainslie As a scientific man he'll be interested

ANGELA I like it It makes you look more English

PRINCE That was why I did it Mademoiselle The only compliment to your country I could think of so early in the morning The birds were whistling and singing, the sun was shining, and I said to myself, "I love England" I shall stay here for ever I shall be an Englishman" So I had what you call the clean shave

BATTERSBY (*fingering his beard*) It isn't absolutely essential

PRINCE (*with a bow*) The full beard or nothing, as in your English navy (*With a gesture at BATTERSBY'S*) If only it had been possible—(*regretfully*)—but there was no time

BATTERSBY (*in a whisper*) You see, dear, he would have liked eggs and bacon

PRINCE So now I am an Englishman I think of calling myself Brown

ANGELA (*smiling*) Prince Brown

PRINCE Or shall I give myself the honourable, if not strictly beautiful, title of Mister?

BATTERSBY What would Neo-Slavonia say to that?

PRINCE Well, that's the question

ANGELA Will the country go to pieces without you?

PRINCE (*solemnly*) I fear it might But don't let me interrupt your letters, Mademoiselle I shall be quite happy with the paper (*He picks it up*)

BATTERSBY It's a piece of yesterday's, I'm afraid

PRINCE I shall be quite happy with a piece of yesterday's paper

BATTERSBY There's a small boy called Lumley whose duty it is to forget to bring the paper every day He is amazingly reliable So I generally do down about this time and fetch it for myself If you don't mind——

ANGELA Go on, Father You'll never be happy till you've seen it

BATTERSBY (*with dignity*) To some women the fact that anybody should be interested in activities outside his own

household will always be one of the more impenetrable mysteries *(He goes out with an air)*

PRINCE Miss Batterby is interested, however

ANGELA In some things

PRINCE In some people

ANGELA *(smiling)* In two people *(Looking at her watch)* You won't go till she comes?

PRINCE I will stay until then, if I may *(He also looks at his watch, and then says, a little anxiously)* This little boy of whom Mr Battersby talks——

ANGELA Lumley?

PRINCE Yes He is unreliable?

ANGELA Very, I'm afraid

PRINCE You ask him to do something, and he goes off bird's-nesting, or fishing?

ANGELA Rather like that

PRINCE However, there are perhaps other little boys in the village not so unreliable?

ANGELA I expect they're all pretty much the same

PRINCE Oh! *(We have another momentary glimpse of IMOGEN at the window)* But I mustn't interrupt you This piece of yesterday's paper is full of good things

ANGELA *(addressing the envelope)* I've just finished

(AINSLIE appears at the door).

AINSLIE May I come in?

ANGELA *(over her shoulder)* Hallo! Come in

AINSLIE Good morning Good morning, Prince Michael

PRINCE Good morning, doctor Still here, you see

AINSLIE I was sorry to have to hurry off last night, and so, hearing what had happened, I thought I would look in and make my apologies and good-byes this morning

PRINCE How charming of you *(Smiling)* And a Republican, too!

AINSLIE My manners are without prejudice to my convictions

ANGELA We're hoping that perhaps it won't be good-bye just yet

AINSLIE Oh, I'm glad Jennifer gave me to understand that I should just have time to catch the Prince before he went

PRINCE How thoughtful of Mrs Bulger

ANGELA (*getting up, letters in hand*) You won't fight if I leave you alone for a moment ?

PRINCE (*feeling AINSLIE'S biceps*) No I promise

ANGELA As long as you don't whistle the Neo-Slavonian national anthem, or anything provocative like that, he'll be all right [*She goes out*]

AINSLIE I'm afraid I shouldn't recognise it (*Awkwardly*) I don't know the etiquette, but may I lean against a table or something ?

PRINCE (*solemnly*) I think I should lean first (*He does so*) There !

AINSLIE (*leaning too*) Thank you (*He begins to fill his pipe*) You won't mind my saying that I wish I hadn't met you ?

PRINCE If you won't mind my asking why

AINSLIE I like keeping my prejudices intact Are you the only Prince with a sense of humour, or have I been wrong all these years ?

PRINCE Isn't it against all medical etiquette for a doctor to be wrong ?

AINSLIE There you are ! You've no business to say things like that (*Preparing to light his pipe*) Do we smoke ?

PRINCE We smoke (*He picks up one of BATTERSBY'S pipes, and holds it in his hand until AINSLIE'S pipe is alight Then he solemnly puts it down again*)

AINSLIE Thank you Curious thing about that young Oliver Have you heard any more this morning ?

PRINCE We are sending over to the hotel for news We may hear something at any moment (*He looks at his watch*)

AINSLIE I suppose you knew all about him ?

PRINCE Does one ever know all about anybody ?

AINSLIE I was thinking of his medical record

PRINCE (*tapping his head*) He had an accident a few years ago

AINSLIE Ah ! Concussion ?

PRINCE I imagine so A stray bullet—on the Indian frontier, I understand Such an accident might cause complete loss of memory and so forth, I suppose ?

AINSLIE Undoubtedly

PRINCE Thank you (*Pretending to hand him money*) Your fee

ANSIE (laughing) Will you appoint me court doctor?

PRINCE Gladly

ANSIE I shall look forward to it. Meanwhile there's a good deal to do in the village. Do we move?

PRINCE We move. (*They move towards the door*)

ANSIE I'm glad that we're not losing you just yet. (*Looking into the garden*) You weren't playing hide-and-seek in the garden just before I came?

PRINCE No, Mr. Battersby had one or two things to do.

ANSIE I thought I saw—— But I daresay it was nothing. *Au revoir, then*. (*He goes out*)

PRINCE *Au revoir*

(*He settles down to his paper*. IMOGEN appears again, and seeing that he is alone, whistles cautiously. He takes no notice. She whistles again—and again.)

IMOGEN (*in a loud whisper*) I say!

PRINCE (*looking round*) Hallo! Miss Imogen! (*He gets up*)

IMOGEN Are you alone?

PRINCE Utterly. (*He comes to her*)

IMOGEN I say, you've shaved off your moustache!

PRINCE (*feeling his face*) So I have.

IMOGEN May I come in?

PRINCE May I conduct you in? (*He gives her his hand and leads her in*)

IMOGEN (*giggling*) I say, what fun!

PRINCE (*smiling*) Isn't it?

IMOGEN You and me

PRINCE Us. Was that you whistling?

IMOGEN Yes

PRINCE It wasn't you whistling outside the studio this morning from about four o'clock till nine?

IMOGEN Not as long as that. I did whistle a bit.

PRINCE Yes. Now tell me. You did what I asked you?

IMOGEN Rather! That's why I wanted to see you. Just to tell you I had.

PRINCE Good!

IMOGEN The boy is going to bring it up in about five minutes. That's right, isn't it?

PRINCE Perfect It isn't a boy called Lumley, I suppose ?

IMOGEN Yes, it is Why ?

PRINCE Oh, nothing You're sure you can trust him ?

IMOGEN I'm sure I *can't* trust him And I told him so And I'm going to watch him do it, and he doesn't get the sixpence until I've seen him do it

PRINCE (*admiringly*) What an ally to have ! (*He holds out his hand*) Shake !

IMOGEN (*shaking it*) Oh, I say ! (*Shyly*) I say ?

PRINCE (*anxiously*) You aren't going to cry again ? (*She shakes her head*) Well ?

IMOGEN That sixpence you gave me to give him

PRINCE (*anxiously*) It was a good one ?

IMOGEN Oo, rather ! But would you mind if I gave him another one of my own instead ? (*Shyly*) Because because

PRINCE (*smiling*) I wish you would, Imogen And the other will be your lucky sixpence ?

IMOGEN (*nodding*) 'm And you're not going now, are you ?

PRINCE I think now I shall be able to stay

IMOGEN Is that why you shaved ? So your enemies shouldn't know you ?

PRINCE Something like that It's a symbol

IMOGEN Of what ?

PRINCE Victory, I hope

IMOGEN (*suddenly*) What's that ?

PRINCE What was it ?

(*They listen*)

IMOGEN I must fly At any moment we might be discovered alone together

PRINCE True And there is also Lumley's boy to be watched

IMOGEN Oo, I say, I'd forgotten him Good-bye, Prince Michael ! (*He holds out his hand Romantically she goes on one knee and kisses it Then she goes off—crying again*)

PRINCE The darling ! (*He returns to his paper . And soon JENNIFER is at the door*)

PRINCE (*without looking round*) I make it five minutes to twelve

JENNIFER So you *are* still here ?

PRINCE (*getting up*) You gave me till noon

JENNIFER How did you know it was me ?

PRINCE What a silly question to ask ! Of course I knew it was you ! (*He turns to her*)

JENNIFER Michael !

PRINCE What ?

JENNIFER Nothing Why did you—(*with a wave of the hand*)—do that ?

PRINCE Do what ?

JENNIFER Shave your moustache

PRINCE I didn't That wasn't *my* moustache It was Prince Michael Robolski's

JENNIFER (*eagerly*) You mean you've told Angela ? She knows ?

PRINCE That I'm an—inventor ?

JENNIFER That you—yes That we're both inventors

PRINCE My dear Jennifer, how could I ? Think how awkward it would be for all of you ! The things you all said to me last night ! I couldn't be so cruel

JENNIFER Then go away now—and nobody need ever know

PRINCE (*like a small boy*) But I don't *want* to go ! I like Wych Trentham I like Mr Battersby I like Miss Angela I like the Doctor I like Miss Faithfull I like Jennifer.

JENNIFER One or the other, Michael

PRINCE The Doctor has just been up to say good-bye to me The poor man was in tears I daresay you met Miss Faithfull She has just been up to say good-bye to me The poor girl was in hysterics Mr Battersby, struggling with his emotions, lent me these trousers He has now gone to buy me a paper They all love me.

JENNIFER Everybody loves a Prince.

PRINCE Except Jennifer

JENNIFER They won't love plain Michael Brown.

PRINCE And yet he is a very lovable man really

JENNIFER Well, do you go or stay ?

PRINCE (*smiling*) I'll toss you for it Heads I stay, tails I remain (*He tosses*) It's tails I remain I remain, yours very sincerely, Michael Robolski

JENNIFER Then I tell Angela

(ANGELA comes in, a letter in her hand)

ANGELA Hallo, darling! Where's the doctor?

PRINCE Gone We embraced, and I gave him the Order of the Leopard, Fifth Class

ANGELA I've got a hundred things to do, so I'll leave you to amuse each other (To the PRINCE) You're staying to lunch, aren't you?

PRINCE (with a look at JENNIFER) Please

ANGELA Good (To JENNIFER) You'd better, too, darling

JENNIFER Angela, dear, wait a moment

PRINCE (looking at his watch) I make it two minutes to twelve (To JENNIFER) I beg your pardon, I thought you asked me the time

ANGELA What is it? I really am busy (To the PRINCE) Oh, this letter has just come for you

PRINCE (relieved) Ah! Thank you Is it permitted?

ANGELA Of course (The PRINCE opens his letter)

JENNIFER Wait a moment, dear There's something I've got to tell you

ANGELA Exciting?

JENNIFER It is rather

PRINCE (who is reading his letter) Pardon! You would wish me to withdraw?

JENNIFER I would wish you to stay

PRINCE (bowing) May I just— (he indicates the letter, and finishes it) Good! (He takes a deep breath) At last! (To JENNIFER) Now I am at your service, Madame

JENNIFER Angela, Prince Michael—

PRINCE Just a moment, if I may interrupt you You called me Prince Michael I cannot leave you under that misapprehension any longer Miss Battersby! My lips at last are unsealed (In his English voice) I am not Prince Michael!

ANGELA (casually) Why not?

PRINCE (with dignity) I am trying to explain (Tapping his letter) At last I am at liberty to speak. I owe you the most sincere apology You thought you were entertaining Prince Michael Robolski of Neo-Slavonia last night In a sense you were But it was not I

ANGELA What do you mean?

PRINCE I was only the humble secretary. He who called himself James Oliver was the real Prince

JENNIFER Oh !

PRINCE You are surprised ?

JENNIFER (*recovering*) Just for the moment

ANGELA So you're an Englishman after all ?

PRINCE Certainly Three months ago the Prince engaged me as his secretary I asked him what were my duties He said, "To grow a moustache and listen" For a month I grew a moustache and listened, while he talked to me about Neo-Slavonia In the end I felt that I knew the country even better than he did Then he said, "Now if we go to a place where we are both unknown, can you pretend to be Prince Michael, while I pretend to be his secretary ?"

ANGELA Why ?

PRINCE (*not knowing*) Why ?

JENNIFER Yes, why ?

PRINCE Why ? That was what I said Why ? He gave reasons, political reasons, which would sound stupid to you if I repeated them now, but to one who understood Neo-Slavonian politics as I did, were very, very—er, very

ANGELA Where was this ?

PRINCE Where was it ?

JENNIFER Yes, where was it ?

PRINCE Where was it ? . In a little seaport town called Bratsk The—Cromer of Neo-Slavonia

ANGELA But I thought Neo-Slavonia had no coast-line

JENNIFER (*eagerly*) Yes !

PRINCE (*reproachfully*) One small pier and a group of bathing-machines do not constitute a coast-line

ANGELA I beg your pardon

JENNIFER Silly of us

ANGELA Well ?

PRINCE We went to Monte Carlo—I as the Prince, he as my secretary Every now and then he would disappear It was not my business to follow him I am engaged to grow a moustache, not to search for footprints One day he takes me to England "Very soon now," he says, "we shall be able to reveal the truth"

ANGELA (*smiling*) And so, very soon now, you are going to ?

PRINCE (*with dignity*) I am doing it at this moment He gives me permission in his letter (*He taps the letter*) He also gives me my wages—(*he holds up the notes*)—instead of a month's notice I am my own master again

And out of a job

ANGELA And that's that ?

PRINCE (*with a sigh of mental exhaustion*) That, roughly speaking, is that

ANGELA Well, I'm glad one of you was the Prince I don't know what Mrs Faithfull would say if there had never been a Prince at all

JENNIFER There wasn't

PRINCE Ha !

ANGELA How do you mean, darling ?

JENNIFER There is no such country as Neo-Slavonia

PRINCE Ha again

ANGELA (*calmly*) Darling, how *can* you know that ?

JENNIFER Have you ever seen it on the map ?

ANGELA Have you ever seen Czecho-Slovakia on the map ?

PRINCE (*aside*) Or Maida Vale

ANGELA Or Maida Vale ?

JENNIFER No

ANGELA Well !

PRINCE Well !

JENNIFER Well, I wasn't certain either So this morning I telegraphed to a friend in the Foreign Office

ANGELA But would *he* know ?

PRINCE How could *he* know ?

JENNIFER (*displaying telegram*) Here is his answer (*She gives it to Angela*) I said, " Where is Neo-Slavonia ? " He replies—

ANGELA (*reading*) " Never heard of it " Well, of course, it mightn't be in his department (*Handing back the telegram*) I don't think that that's conclusive

PRINCE I don't think that's at all conclusive

JENNIFER My dear, I *know* that there isn't such a country

ANGELA I don't see how you *can* know

PRINCE I don't see how any one can *love*

ANGELA You might suspect (*To PRINCE*) What do you think?

PRINCE (*automatically*) What do you think? I mean, What do I think?

ANGELA Well?

PRINCE (*after thought*) I believe Mrs Bulger is right

JENNIFER Thank you

ANGELA But how—

PRINCE I believe that he had made it all up

ANGELA But I thought you said you had actually been in Neo-Slavonia with him?

JENNIFER Biatsk—the local Cromer

PRINCE (*with dignity*) You go to a town—how do you know who the town belongs to? If he says it is a Neo-Slavonian town, why should I doubt him? I am engaged as a secretary, not as a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (*To ANGELA*) Yes, the more I think about it, the more I feel that he made it all up (*Triumphantly*) And that's why he disappeared so suddenly last night—without even saying good-bye He saw that Mrs Bulger was suspicious (*Sadly*) Yes, I feel sure now that the Prince was an impostor Don't you agree with me, Mrs Bulger?

JENNIFER Entirely

PRINCE (*to ANGELA*) You see, Mrs Bulger agrees with me entirely I wonder what his game was It may have been just pure love of adventure I shouldn't care to think too hardly of him Miss Battersby, how can I apologise for having brought this on you?

ANGELA Mr Oliver, it has been a privilege to listen to you

JENNIFER Oliver? (*To the PRINCE with a friendly smile*) Of course! Oliver

PRINCE (*puzzled*) Oliver?

JENNIFER Your name You changed names with the Prince

PRINCE (*recovering gallantly*) Not names Identities

ANGELA Why not names?

JENNIFER Why not names?

PRINCE (*wondering*) Well—

ANGELA You took his—why didn't he take yours ?

JENNIFER Why didn't he take yours ?

PRINCE This is really rather embarrassing

JENNIFER (*catching his eye*) Yes, I can see how embarrassing it is

PRINCE (*suddenly*) Can you ? Well, if you can't now, you will directly Miss Battersby, the Prince refused to take my name He said, "No, I cannot take that horrible name"

ANGELA Why ?

PRINCE (*unexpressively*) Because my name is—Bulger !

JENNIFER (*staggered*) Oh !

PRINCE You are surprised again ?

JENNIFER Just for another moment

PRINCE BULGER (*to JENNIFER*) I have sometimes wondered if we are relations ? (*To ANGELA*) You remember how interested I was when you first told me your friend's name ? I wondered then

ANGELA Jennifer's husband was a General in the Indian Army

PRINCE (*eagerly*) Really ? How odd ! Not James ?

JENNIFER (*weakly*) James

PRINCE How very curious !

ANGELA Did you know him ?

PRINCE I am James Bulger of the Indian Army

JENNIFER No, no !

PRINCE (*quickly*) Or am I not ? You see, Miss Battersby I was knocked out rather badly in a small frontier skirmish—by a stray bullet—left for dead, captured by the advancing enemy When I came to myself, my memory had gone I remembered nothing Not even my own identity A flask in my possession with the name James Bulger on it and the simple inscription "Presented by a few old friends of the Hammersmith Temperance Association" was my only clue But was it my own flask, or had James Bulger lent it to me ? I shall never be certain For at times I have had a curious feeling that my real name is— (*he looks at JENNIFER*)—Brown

ANGELA It sounds very likely A lot of people are called Brown

PRINCE Is that so ? (*To JENNIFER*) In that case you must permit me to return your husband's flask to you.

JENNIFER (*weakly*) Thank you. You haven't it on you."

PRINCE And if you will be so very kind as to talk to me a little about him, it may be that you will strike some responsive chord in my memory, and set it vibrating.

ANGELA (*getting up*) That's a good idea. And when you're quite certain who you're going to be, you must let me know. Anyway, you'll stay to lunch? I think you've earned it.

PRINCE It is charming of you to have me.

ANGELA (*graciously*) Not at all. The excitement is ours.
[*She goes out*]

JENNIFER Well, Michael? (*She sits down*)

PRINCE (*triumphantly*) Well, Jennifer? (*He sits next to her. She turns away, and he turns away. They talk, back to back.*)

JENNIFER (*reluctantly*) You're very clever.

PRINCE Aren't I?

JENNIFER Naturally you've had a good deal of practice.

PRINCE Naturally.

JENNIFER I suppose you feel you've gained something by it all?

PRINCE Lunch—anyway. If I had let myself be exposed by you, I shouldn't have had lunch.

JENNIFER Oh, if you're as hungry as that—

PRINCE I am afraid you haven't realised the extraordinary delicacy with which I have handled the matter?

JENNIFER I hadn't, no.

PRINCE You see, I wasn't sure what you wanted. Did you want to go on being the wife of General Bulger? If so, here I am, your long-lost husband, Bulger, miraculously restored to you. Did you want to confess the truth, that you are really Mrs. Michael Brown? Here am I, the only original Michael Brown. Or do you want to marry again, and try another name? Here am I, still at your service, prepared to remember that my name is—whatever you most fancy. (*Proudly*) Very few people could have been as tactful as that.

JENNIFER But how considerate of you!

PRINCE (*modestly*) I am that sort of man.

JENNIFER You seem to have provided for everything.

PRINCE I tried to.

JENNIFER And yet there was one possibility you overlooked

PRINCE Good Heavens, what?

JENNIFER In your extraordinary delicacy you didn't allow for the fact that I might want to be left alone

PRINCE (*looking at his watch*) For how long?

JENNIFER (*a little crossly*) What do you mean, for how long? When a woman says that she wants to be left alone, you don't ask her for how long

PRINCE Why not?

JENNIFER I don't know why not. One doesn't. It's a ridiculous question. Naturally, I mean that I want to be left alone for ever

PRINCE I see. You mean till you're about ninety

JENNIFER No, I don't. I wasn't thinking about being ninety

PRINCE Good! Then what about eighty-nine? Suppose I drop in on your eighty-ninth birthday—

JENNIFER I shall not be at home

PRINCE Not if I came in the afternoon—with a few flowers?

JENNIFER (*coldly*) I want to be left alone

PRINCE By me—or by everybody?

JENNIFER By you. By everybody in the way you're talking about. I don't propose to marry again

PRINCE (*gently*) It was I who was proposing

JENNIFER Then I am not open to offers of marriage

PRINCE Well, if you won't marry again, will you live with either of your two previous husbands?

JENNIFER No

PRINCE You refuse?

JENNIFER Absolutely

PRINCE You're very difficult to please

JENNIFER No, I'm not. I'm very easy to please. I only want you to go away

PRINCE (*reproachfully*) After all the trouble I've taken?

JENNIFER Go away

PRINCE It is a little hard on a man who has been travelling for years in an unknown country to come back to his wife, and to find that—like Penelope . . . no, not like Penelope . . . well, it's a little hard

JENNIFER I should keep Penelope out of it, if I were you
PRINCE I was trying to

JENNIFER When Ulysses left her, he did at least give her some idea when he was coming back

PRINCE But what a wrong idea! "Back at Christmas," he said cheerfully and it was twenty years before he saw her again

JENNIFER She knew what he was doing, anyhow

PRINCE Rescuing Helen, the most beautiful creature in the world That would be a great comfort to any woman

JENNIFER I don't want to argue about it

PRINCE I went away in a much better cause than Ulysses If you had read the right sort of stories when you were young you would have realised that, metaphorically speaking, you and I were in a sledge, pursued by a pack of wolves over the snowy steppes of Siberia Ivan Ivanovitch, our faithful Cossack driver, flogs the fast-wearying horses, from time to time I empty my revolver into the advancing hordes and force them to stop and eat each other, all to no purpose And then, when I make the supreme sacrifice by hurling myself into the midst of the ravening pack, what happens? I am blamed because I left the sledge suddenly, and forgot to say, "Back on the 25th"

JENNIFER I don't think that that is a perfect parallel

PRINCE According to Einstein there are no perfect parallels But I'm doing my best (*He gets up*) I'm doing my best (*She looks away*) Jenny! (*She has her hand to her ear, arranging the hair above it He seizes her wrist—and then suddenly talks down her ear, as if it were a telephone, using her hand as the receiver*) Hallo, is that the exchange? I want Jenny One in a million Jenny, one in one double O, double O, double O . Yes Hallo, Jenny, is that you? Guess! No No I say, what swell people you know! Shall I tell you?

. Michael Don't you remember Michael? The ugly fellow who was always grouching because he couldn't get a job Yes Casual sort of fellow . It's him he Oh, much the same I suppose you wouldn't let him come down to your village, and just *look* at you

occasionally Oh, I don't know He could sit behind you at church or something Oh, don't you? Then it's quite time you did You *wouldn't* care about it?

Oh! Oh, I just wondered I expect you're right
(*He hangs up the receiver and walks away, whistling carelessly, to the writing-desk, where he sits down and begins to write*)

JENNIFER (*after watching him for a little*) What are you doing?

PRINCE Making my will, and leaving everything to you, of course

JENNIFER Oh, are you shooting yourself?

PRINCE Obviously

JENNIFER I thought you made a will when we first got married

PRINCE (*annoyed*) Can't I do it again if I want to?

JENNIFER Of course But I thought I got the money anyhow? Even if you died—what's the word? Rather a horrid one——

PRINCE "Suddenly"

JENNIFER Intestate (*To herself as if commenting on a man who has died of this unfortunate complaint*) So painful, poor fellow!

PRINCE (*fiercely*) Good heavens, if a man can't make a remorseful will just before shooting himself, life becomes utterly impossible

JENNIFER I beg your pardon

PRINCE I'm sorry Naturally I am a little on edge

JENNIFER (*after a pause—to herself*) Four "s's" in "possessed" Some people only put three

PRINCE In my last moments I propose to allow myself perfect liberty in the matter

JENNIFER (*after a pause*) Which would be the best solicitor to go to? My own or yours?

PRINCE I leave that to you (*Looking upwards*) I shall never meet either of them again (*Looking downwards*) At least, I hope not

JENNIFER (*after a pause*) Michael!

PRINCE H'sh, h'sh!

JENNIFER Michael!

(He doesn't answer. She trills like a telephone bell.)

PRINCE Damn that telephone *(She rings again)* Oh Lord! *(He gets up and goes to her, putting his left hand to her mouth, and her right hand to his ear.)*

JENNIFER Hallo! Hallo! Oh, is that Prince Michael of Neo-Slavonia? Yes! However did you guess? Really? A little bit older and fatter. What? Oh, how sweet of you! You can tell from the voice? Michael, how clever of you! Well, you'll see for yourself. Yes, that's what I wanted to say. Just before you shoot yourself. Oh, well, you must ask me. I don't know. I haven't decided. All right, I'll wait for you. Good-bye.

(She kisses his hand. He kisses her.)

PRINCE Well, Jenny?

JENNIFER Well, Mike?

PRINCE I've come back.

JENNIFER So it seems.

PRINCE What about it?

JENNIFER I don't know.

PRINCE Shall we try?

JENNIFER *(nodding)* If you like.

PRINCE Thank you, Jenny.

JENNIFER It's an experiment, of course.

PRINCE Isn't that the most fun?

JENNIFER You're an adventurer at heart, you know.

PRINCE You too, Jennifer.

JENNIFER *(smiling)* I suppose I am.

PRINCE Adventurers, both.

JENNIFER I suppose any morning I may wake up and find that you've gone off to be the Prince of some imaginary country.

PRINCE And any afternoon I may wake up to find that you've run off with some imaginary General.

JENNIFER Yes, we've got to remember that.

PRINCE Yes.

JENNIFER Michael?

PRINCE Jennifer.

JENNIFER I think we'll keep an atlas in the house.

PRINCE *(nodding)* And an Army List.

JENNIFER And some day, perhaps, I shall come upon

you looking wistfully at that atlas, wondering where Neo-Slavonia is

PRINCE And some day, perhaps I shall find you fluttering the pages of that Army List, and wondering which General most wants a widow

JENNIFER And when that happens to either of us, then one will know that the other one——

PRINCE Wants a little holiday

JENNIFER So they'll say to each other quite casually, "Oh, are *you* off?"

PRINCE And off they'll go

JENNIFER And then when they've been away long enough——

PRINCE Not four years this time——

JENNIFER Only a little while——

PRINCE They'll try to find each other again

JENNIFER And they will have so much to tell each other——

PRINCE That they will never be bored

JENNIFER It might work that way.

PRINCE It might

JENNIFER (*holding out her hands*) Worth trying, Michael?

PRINCE (*taking them*) Worth trying, Jennifer

(*As they stand there, BATTERSBY bursts in with the paper, obviously excited*)

BATTERSBY I say! I say! I say! Just as well I went to get the paper

PRINCE (*vaguely, dropping JENNIFER'S hands*) The paper?

BATTERSBY (*showing the place*) Look here, Prince! There! (*They take the paper and look at it together*) I say, Angela! (*He hurries off to her*) I say! Angela!

PRINCE (*reading*) Sudden Revolution in—— Neo-Slavonia! (*He stares blankly at her*)

JENNIFER But you said there wasn't!

PRINCE There isn't! I invented it

JENNIFER (*pointing to paper*) But there must be!

PRINCE (*nodding*) There must be (*Sadly*) Jennifer, Jennifer, I thought I was a creator, and I'm just an ordinary impostor after all

JENNIE (very soothingly) Never mind, darling Better luck next time !

(Angela is at the door, a cigarette in her mouth, a cocktail in her hand)

ANGELA (regarding them with an indulgent smile) Come along, children !

(Hand in hand, they walk past her, the children, and go out She follows them)

BELINDA

AN APRIL FOLLY IN THREE ACTS

IMPORTANT

*No performance of this play may be given
unless written permission has been obtained
from*

Messrs Samuel French, Ltd ,
26 Southampton Street, Strand,
London, W C 2

CHARACTERS

BELINDA TREMAYNE
DELIA (*her daughter*)
HAROLD BAXTER
CLAUDE DEVENISH
JOHN TREMAYNE
BETTY

The action takes place in Belinda's country-house in Devonshire at the end of April

THIS play was first produced by Mr Dion Boucicault at the New Theatre on April 8, 1918, with the following cast

<i>Belinda Tremayne</i>	IRENE VANBRUGH
<i>Delia</i>	ISOBEL ELSOM
<i>Harold Baxter</i>	DION BOUCICAULT
<i>Claude Devenish</i>	DENNIS NEILSON-TERRY
<i>John Tremayne</i>	BEN WEBSTER
<i>Betty</i>	ANNE WALDEN

BELINDA

ACT I

*It is a lovely April afternoon—a foretaste of summer—in
BELINDA'S garden*

BETTY, a middle-aged servant, is fastening a hammock—*its first appearance this year—between two trees at the back. In front of these there is a solid oak garden-table, with a comfortable chair on the right of it and a straight-backed one on the left. There are books, papers, and magazines on the table.* BELINDA, of whom we shall know more presently, is on the other side of the open French-windows which lead into the garden, talking to BETTY

BELINDA (*from inside the house*) Are you sure you're tying it up tightly enough, Betty?

BETTY Yes, ma'am, I think it's firm

BELINDA Because I'm not the fairy I used to be.

BETTY (*trying the knots at the other end of the hammock*) Yes, ma'am, it's quite firm this end too.

BELINDA It's not the ends I'm frightened of, it's the middle where the weight's coming (*She comes into the garden*) It looks very nice

BETTY Yes, ma'am

BELINDA (*trying the middle of it with her hand*) I asked them at the Stores if they were quite sure it would bear me, and they said it would take anything up to—I forget how many tons. I know I thought it was rather rude of them (*Looking at it anxiously*) How does one get in? So trying to be a sailor!

BETTY I think you sit in it, ma'am, and then (*explaining with her hands*) throw your legs over

BELINDA I see (*She sits gingerly in the hammock, and then, with a sudden flutter of white, does what BETTY suggests*) Yes (*Regretfully*) I'm afraid that was rather wasted on you, Betty We must have some spectators next time

BETTY Yes, ma'am

BELINDA Cushions (*She arranges them at her back with BETTY's help With a sigh of comfort*) There ! Now then, Betty, about callers

BETTY Yes, ma'am

BELINDA If Mr Baxter calls—he is the rather prim gentleman——

BETTY Yes, ma'am, the one who's been here several times before

BELINDA Yes Well, if he calls, you'll say, "Not at home"

BETTY Yes, ma'am

BELINDA He will say, "Oh—ei—oh—ei—really" Then you'll smile very sweetly and say, "I beg your pardon, was it Mr *Baxter*?" And he'll say, "Yes !" and you'll say, "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir *this way*, please"

BETTY Yes, ma'am

BELINDA That's right, Betty Well now, if Mr Devenish calls—he is the rather poetical gentleman——

BETTY Yes, ma'am, the one who's always coming here

BELINDA Yes Well, if he calls you'll say, "Not at home"

BETTY Yes, ma'am

BELINDA He'll immediately throw down his bunch of flowers and dive desparingly into the moat You'll stop him, just as he is going in, and say "I beg your pardon, sir, was it Mr *Devenish*?" And he will say, "Yes !" and you will say, "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, *this way*, please"

BETTY Yes, ma'am And suppose they both call together ?

BELINDA We won't suppose anything so exciting, Betty

BETTY. No, ma'am And suppose any other gentleman calls ?

BELINDA (*with a sigh*) There aren't any other gentlemen

BETTY It might be a clergyman, come to ask for a subscription like

BELINDA If it's a clergyman, Betty, I shall—I shall want your assistance out of the hammock first

BETTY Yes, ma'am

BELINDA That's all To anybody else I'm not at home Oh, just give me that little green book (*Pointing to books on the table*) The one at the bottom there—that's the one (*BETTY gives it to her*) Thank you (*Reading the title*) "The Lute of Love," by Claude Devenish (*To herself as she turns the pages*) It doesn't seem much for half a crown when you think of the *Daily Telegraph* Lute . . . Lute. I should have quite a pretty mouth if I kept on saying that (*With a great deal of expression*) Lute ! (*She pats her mouth back*)

BETTY Is that all, ma'am ?

BELINDA That's all (*BETTY prepares to go*) Oh, what am I thinking of ! (*Waving to the table*) I want that review, I think it's the blue one (*As BETTY begins to look*) It has an article by Mr Baxter on the "Rise of Lunacy in the Eastern Counties"—yes, that's the one, I'd better have that, too, I'm just at the most exciting place You shall have it after me, Betty

BETTY Is that all, ma'am ?

BELINDA Yes, that really is all

[*BETTY goes into the house*]

BELINDA (*reading to herself*) "It is a matter of grave concern to all serious students of social problems——" (*Putting the review down and shaking her head gently*) But not in April (*Lazily opening the book and reading*) "Tell me where is love"—well, that's the question, isn't it ? (*She puts the book down, gives a sigh of happiness, and lazily closes her eyes* DELIA comes into the garden, from Paris. She is decidedly a modern girl, pretty and self-possessed Her hair is half-way up, waiting for her birthday, perhaps She sees her mother suddenly, stops, and then goes on tiptoe to the head of the hammock She smiles and kisses her mother on the forehead BELINDA, looking supremely unconscious, goes on sleeping DELIA kisses her lightly again BELINDA wakes up with an extraordinarily natural start, and is just about to say, "Oh, Mr Devenish—you mustn't !"—when she sees DELIA) Delia !

DELIA Well, mummy, aren't you glad to see me ?

BELINDA

[ACT I

ate BELINDA My darling child

(They kiss each other frantically)

BELIA Say you're glad

BELINDA *(sitting up)* My darling, I'm absolutely—— Hold the hammock while I get out, dear, we don't want an accident *(Getting out with DELIA's help)* They're all right when you're there, and they'll bear two tons, but they're horrid getting in and out of *(Kissing her again)* Darling, it really is you "

DELIA Oh it is jolly seeing you again I believe you were asleep

BELINDA *(with dignity)* Certainly not, child *(Picking up the review)* I was reading " The Nineteenth Century " - *(with an air)* and after *(Earnestly)* Darling, wasn't it next Thursday you were coming back "

DELIA No, this Thursday, silly

BELINDA *(penitently)* Oh, my darling, and I was going over to Paris to bring you home

DELIA I half expected you

BELINDA So confusing their both being called Thursday And you were leaving school for the very last time If you don't forgive me, Delia, I shall cry

DELIA *(stroking her hand fondly)* Silly mother "

(BELINDA sits down in a basket chair and DELIA sits on a table next to her)

BELINDA Isn't it a lovely day for April, darling " I've wanted to say that to somebody all day, and you're the first person who's given me the chance Oh, I said it to Betty, but she only said, " Yes, ma'am "

DELIA Poor mother "

BELINDA *(jumping up suddenly and kissing DELIA again)* I simply must have another one And to think that you're never going back to school any more *(Looking at her fondly)* Darling, you *are* looking pretty

DELIA Am I ?

BELINDA Lovely *(Going back to her seat)* And now you're going to stay with me for just as long as you want a mother *(Anxiously)* Darling, you didn't mind being sent away to school, did you ? It is the usual thing, you know

DELIA Silly mother " of course it is

BELINDA (*relieved*) I'm so glad you think so too

DELIA Have you been very lonely without me?

BELINDA Very

DELIA (*holding up a finger*) The truth, mummy!

BELINDA I've missed you horribly, Delia (*Primly*) The absence of female companionship of the requisite——

DELIA Are you really all alone?

BELINDA (*smiling mysteriously*) Well, not always, of course

DELIA (*excitedly, as she slips off the table*) Mummy, I believe you're being bad again

BELINDA Really darling, you forget that I'm old enough to be—in fact, am—your mother

DELIA (*nodding her head*) You *are* being bad

BELINDA (*rising with dignity and drawing herself up to her full height*) My child, that is not the way to——Oh, I say, what a lot taller I am than you!

DELIA And prettier

BELINDA (*fluttering her eyelids*) Oh, do you think so? (*Firmly*) Don't be silly, child

DELIA (*holding up a finger*) Now tell me all that's been happening here at once

BELINDA (*with a sigh*) And I was just going to ask you how you were getting on with your French

DELIA Both *or* French! You've been having a much more interesting time than I have, so you've got to tell

BELINDA (*with a happy sigh*) O-oh! (*She sinks back into her chair*)

DELIA Is it like the Count at Scarborough?

BELINDA (*surprised and pained*) My darling, what *do* you mean?

DELIA Don't you remember the Count who kept proposing to you at Scarborough? I do

BELINDA (*reproachfully*) Dear one, you were the merest child, paddling about on the beach and digging castles

DELIA (*smiling to herself*) I was old enough to notice the Count

BELINDA (*sadly*) And I'd bought her a perfectly new spade! How one deceives oneself!

DELIA And then there was the M.P. who proposed at Windermere

BELINDA Yes, dear, but it wasn't seconded—I mean he never got very far with it

DELIA And the artist in Wales

BELINDA Darling child, what a memory you have No wonder your teachers are p'leased with you

DELIA (*settling herself comfortably*) Now tell me all about this one

BELINDA (*meekly*) Which one?

DELIA (*excitedly*) Oh, are there lots?

BELINDA (*severely*) Only two

DELIA Two! You abandoned woman!

BELINDA It's something in the air, darling I've never been in Devonshire in April before

DELIA Is it really serious this time?

BELINDA (*pained*) I wish you wouldn't say *this* time, Delia It sounds so unromantic If you'd only put it into French—*cette fois*—it sounds so much better *Cette fois* (*Parentally*) When one's daughter has just returned from an expensive schooling in Paris, one likes to feel—

DELIA What I meant, dear, was, am I to have a stepfather at last?

BELINDA Now you're being *too* French, darling

DELIA Why, do you still think father may be alive?

BELINDA Why not? It's only eighteen years since he left us, and he was quite a young man then

DELIA Yes, but surely you'd have heard from him in all those years, if he'd been alive?

BELINDA Well, he hasn't heard from *me*, and I'm still alive

DELIA (*looking earnestly at her mother*) I shall never understand it

BELINDA Understand what?

DELIA Were you as heavenly when you were young as you are now?

BELINDA (*rapturously*) Oh, I was sweet!

DELIA And yet he left you after only six months

BELINDA (*rather crossly*) I wish you wouldn't keep on saying he left me I left him too

DELIA Why?

BELINDA (*smiling to herself*) Well, you see, he was quite certain he knew how to manage women, and I was quite

certain I knew how to manage men (*Thoughtfully*) If only one of us had been certain, it would have been all right

DELIA (*seriously*) What really happened, mummy? I'm grown up now so I think you ought to tell me

BELINDA (*thoughtfully*) That was about all, you know except for his beard

DELIA Had he a beard? How funny

BELINDA Yes, dear, it was, but he never would see it He took it quite seriously

DELIA And did you say dramatically, "If you really loved me, you'd take it off"?

BELINDA (*apologetically*) I'm afraid I did, darling

DELIA And what did he say?

BELINDA He said—*very* rudely—that, if I loved *him*, I'd do my hair in a different way

DELIA How ridiculous!

BELINDA (*touching her hair*) Of course, I didn't do it like this then (*With a sigh*) I suppose we never ought to have married, really

DELIA Why did you?

BELINDA Mother rather wanted it (*Solemnly*) Delia, never get married because your mother—— Oh, I forgot, I'm your mother

DELIA And I don't want a better one And so you left each other?

BELINDA Yes

DELIA Didn't you tell him there was going to be a Me?

BELINDA Oh no!

DELIA I wonder why not?

BELINDA Well, you see, if I had, he might have wanted to stay

DELIA But——

BELINDA (*hurt*) If he didn't want to stay for *me*, I didn't want him to stay for *you* (*Penitently*) Forgive me, darling, but I didn't know you very well then (*DELIA jumps off the table and hugs her mother impetuously*) We've been very happy together, haven't we?

DELIA (*going back to her seat*) I should think we have

BELINDA I don't want to deny you anything, and, of course, if you'd like a stepfather (*looking down modestly*) or two——

DELIA Oh, you *have* been enjoying yourself

BELINDA. Only you see how awkward it would be if Jack turned up in the middle of the wedding, like—like Eugene Aram

DELIA Lnoch Arden, darling

BELINDA It's very confusing their having the same initials Perhaps I'd better call them both L. A. in future and then I shall be safe Well, anyhow it would be awkward darling, wouldn't it? Not that I should know him from Adam after all these years—except for a mole on his left arm

DELIA Perhaps Adam had a mole

BELINDA No, darling, you're thinking of Noah He had two

DELIA (*thoughtfully*) I wonder what would happen if you met somebody whom you really did fall in love with

BELINDA (*reproachfully*) Now you're being serious, and it's April

DELIA Aren't these two—the present two—serious?

BELINDA Oh no! They think they are, but they aren't a bit, really Besides, I'm doing them such a lot of good I'm sure they'd hate to marry me, but they love to think they're in love with me and—I love it, and—and *they* love it, and—and we *all* love it

DELIA You really are the biggest, darlinest baby who ever lived. Do say I shan't spoil your lovely times

BELINDA (*surprised*) Spoil them? Why, you'll make them more lovely than ever

DELIA Well, but do they know you have a grown-up daughter?

BELINDA (*suddenly realizing*). Oh!

DELIA It doesn't really matter, because you don't look a day more than thirty

BELINDA (*absently*) No (*Hurriedly*) I mean, how sweet of you—only——

DELIA What?

BELINDA (*playing with her rings*) Well, one of them, Mr. Baxter—Harold—(*she looks quickly up at DELIA and down again in pretty affectation, but she is really laughing at herself all the time*) he writes statistical articles for the Reviews—percentages and all those things He's just the

sort of man, if he knew that I was your mother, to work it out that I was *more* than thirty The other one, Mr Devenish—Claude—(*she looks up and down as before*) he's rather, rather poetical He thinks I came straight from heaven—last week

DELIA (*jumping up*) I think I'd better go straight back to Paris

BELINDA (*jumping up and holding her firmly by the arms*) You will do nothing of the sort You will take off that hat—(*she lets go of one arm and begins to take out the pin*) which is a perfect duck, and I don't know why I didn't say so before—(*she puts the hat down on the table*) and let me take a good look at you (*she does so*), and kiss you (*she does so*), and then we'll go to your room and unpack and have a lovely talk about clothes And then we'll have tea

BETTY *comes in*

BELINDA And now here's Betty coming in to upset all our delightful plans, just when we've made them

DELIA How are you, Betty? I've left school

BETTY Very nicely, thank you, miss You've grown

BELINDA (*patting the top of DELIA's head*) I'm much taller than she it Well, Betty what is it?

BETTY The two gentlemen, Mr Baxter and Mr Devenish, have both called together, ma'am

BELINDA (*excited*) Oh! How—how very simultaneous of them!

DELIA (*eagerly*) Oh, do let me see them!

BELINDA Darling, you'll see plenty of them before you've finished (*To BETTY*) What have you done with them?

BETTY They're waiting in the hall, ma'am, while I said I would see if you were at home

BELINDA All right, Betty Give me two minutes and then show them out here

BETTY Yes, ma'am

[*Exit*

BELINDA They can't do much harm to each other in two minutes

DELIA (*taking her hat*) Well, I'll go and unpack You really won't mind my coming down afterwards?

BELINDA Of course not (*A little awkwardly*) Darling one, I wonder if you'd mind—just at first—being intro-

duced as my niece. You see, I expect they're in a bad temper already, having come here together, and we don't want to spoil their day entirely.

DELIA (*smiling*) I'll be your mother if you like.

BLINDA Oh no, that wouldn't do, because then Mr Baxter would feel that he ought to ask your permission before paying his attentions to me. He's just that sort of man. A niece is so safe—however good you are at statistics, you can't really prove anything.

DELIA All right, mummy.

BLINDA (*enjoying herself*) You'd like to be called by a different name, wouldn't you? There's something so thrilling about taking a false name. Such a lot of adventures begin like that. How would you like to be Miss Robinson, darling? It's a nice easy one to remember. (*Persuasively*) And you shall put your hair up so as to feel more disguised. What fun we're going to have!

DELIA. You baby! All right, then, I'm Miss Robinson, your favourite niece. (*She moves towards the house*)

BLINDA How sweet of you! Oh, I'm coming with you to do your hair. You don't think you're going to be allowed to do it yourself, when so much depends on it, and husbands leave you because of it, and——

[*They go in together*]

BETTY comes from the other side of the house into the garden, followed by MR BAXTER and MR DEVENISH. MR BAXTER is forty-five, prim and erect, with close trimmed moustache and side-whiskers. His clothes are dark and he wears a bowler-hat. MR DEVENISH is a long-haired good-looking boy in a *négligé* costume, perhaps twenty-two years old, and very scornful of the world.

BETTY (*looking about her surprised*) The mistress was here a moment ago. I expect she'll be back directly, if you'll just wait. [*She goes back into the house*]

(MR BAXTER puts his bowler-hat firmly on his head and sits down very stiffly and upright in a chair on the left-hand side of the table. DEVENISH throws his felt hat on to the table and walks about inquisitively. He sees the review in the hammock and picks it up.)

DEVENISH Good heavens, Baxter, she's been reading your article !

BAXTER I daresay she's not the only one

DEVENISH That's only guesswork , you don't know of anyone else

BAXTER How many people, may I ask, have bought your poems ?

DEVENISH (*loftily*) I don't write for the mob

BAXTER I think I may say that of my own work

DEVENISH Baxter, I don't want to disappoint you, but I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that you *are* one of the mob (*Annoyed*) Dash it ! what are you doing in the country at all in a bowler-hat ?

BAXTER If I wanted to be personal, I could say, " Why don't you get your hair cut ? " Only that form of school-boy humour doesn't appeal to me

DEVENISH This is not a personal matter , I am protesting on behalf of nature What do the birds and the flowers and the beautiful trees think of your hat ?

BAXTER If one began to ask oneself what the birds thought of things—— (*He pauses*)

DEVENISH Well, and why shouldn't one ask oneself ? It is better than asking oneself what the Stock Exchange thinks of things

BAXTER Well (*looking up at DEVENISH's extravagant hair*) it's the nesting season (*Suddenly*) Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !

DEVENISH (*hastily smoothing it down*) Really, Baxter, you're vulgar (*He turns away and resumes his promenading Suddenly he sees his book on the grass beneath the hammock and makes a dash for it*) Ha, my book ! (*Gloating over it*) Baxter, she reads my book

BAXTER I suppose you gave her a copy

DEVENISH (*exultingly*) Yes, I gave her a copy My next book will be hers and hers alone

BAXTER Then let me say that, in my opinion, you took a very great liberty

DEVENISH Liberty ! And this from a man who is continually forcing his unwelcome statistics upon her

BAXTER At any rate, I flatter myself that there is no suggestion of impropriety in anything that I write

DEVENISH I'm not so sure about that, Baxter

BAXTER What do you mean, sir?

DEVENISH Did you read *The Times* this month on the new reviews?

BAXTER Well?

DEVENISH Oh, nothing. It just said, "Mr Baxter's statistics are extremely suggestive." I haven't read them, so of course I don't know what you've been up to.

BAXTER (*turning away in disgust*) Pah!

DEVENISH Poor old Baxter! (*He wanders about the garden again, and, having picked a flower, comes to rest against one of the trees from which the hammock is swung. He leans against this and regards the flower thoughtfully*) Baxter—

BAXTER (*crossly*) I wish you wouldn't keep calling me "Baxter."

DEVENISH Harold.

BAXTER It is only by accident—an accident which we both deplore—that we have met at all, and in any case I am a considerably older man than yourself.

DEVENISH Mr Baxter—father—I have a proposal to make. We will leave it to this beautiful flower to decide which of us the lady loves.

BAXTER (*turning round*) Eh?

DEVENISH (*pulling off the petals*) She loves me, she loves Mr Baxter, she loves me, she loves Mr Baxter—Heaven help her!—she loves me—

BELINDA (*at the garden door*) What are you doing, Mr Devenish?

DEVENISH (*throwing away the flower and bowing very low*) My lady.

BAXTER (*removing his bowler-hat stiffly*) Good-afternoon, Mrs Tremayne.

(*She gives her left hand to DEVENISH, who kisses it, and her right to BAXTER, who shakes it*)

BELINDA How nice of you both to come!

BAXTER Mr Devenish and I are inseparable—apparently.

BELINDA You haven't told me what you were doing, Mr Devenish. Was it "This year, next year" or "Silk, satin—"?

DEVENISH My lady, it was even more romantic than

that I have the honour to announce to your ladyship that Mr Baxter is to be a sailor

BELINDA (*to BAXTER*) Doesn't he talk nonsense?

BAXTER He'll grow out of it I did

BELINDA Oh, I hope not I love talking nonsense, and I'm ever so old (*As they both start forward to protest*) Now which one of you will say it first?

DEVENISH You are as old as the stars and as young as the dawn

BAXTER You are ten years younger than I am

BELINDA What sweet things to say! I don't know which I like best

DEVENISH Where will my lady sit?

BELINDA I will recline in the hammock, an it please thee, my lord—only it's rather awkward getting in, Mr Baxter Perhaps you'd both better look at the tulips for a moment

BAXTER Oh—ah—yes (*He puts his hat on and turns his back to the hammock*)

DEVENISH If only—

BELINDA You'd better not say anything, Mr Devenish Keep it for your next volume (*He turns away*) One two, three—that was better than last time (*They turn round to see her safely in the hammock* DEVENISH *leans against the tree at her feet, and BAXTER draws back the chair from the right side of the table and turns it round towards her* He presses his hat more firmly on and sits down) I wonder if either of you can guess what I've been reading this afternoon

DEVENISH (*looking at her lovingly*) I know

BELINDA (*giving him a fleeting look*) How did you know? (*To BAXTER*) Yes, Mr Baxter, it was your article I was reading If you'd come five minutes earlier you'd have found we wrestling—I mean revelling in it

BAXTER I am very greatly honoured, Mrs Tremayne Ah—it seemed to me a very interesting curve showing the rise and fall of—

BELINDA I hadn't got up to the curves They are interesting, aren't they? They are really more in Mr Devenish's line. (*To DEVENISH*) Mr Devenish, it was a great disappointment to me that all the poems in your book seemed to be written to somebody else

DEVENISH It was before I met you, lady They were addressed to the goddess of my imagination It is only in these last few weeks that I have discovered her

BELINDA And discovered she was dark and not fair

DEVENISH She will be dark in my next volume

BELINDA Oh, how nice of her !

BAXTER (*kindly*) You should write a real poem to Mrs Tremayne

BELINDA (*excitedly*) Oh do ! "To Belinda" I don't know what rhymes, except cinder You could say your heart was like a cinder—all burnt up

DEVENISH (*pained*) I'm afraid that is a cockney rhyme

BELINDA How thrilling ! I've never been to Hampstead Heath.

DEVENISH "Belinda" It is too beautiful to rhyme with anything but itself

BELINDA Fancy ! But what about Tremayne ? (*Singing*) Oh, I am Mrs Tremayne, and I don't want to marry again

DEVENISH (*protesting*) My lady !

BAXTER (*protesting*) Belinda !

BELINDA (*pointing excitedly to BAXTER*) There, that's the first time he's called me Belinda !

DEVENISH Are you serious ?

BELINDA Not as a rule

DEVENISH You're not going to marry again ?

BELINDA Well, who could I marry ?

DEVENISH
and } (*together*) Me !

BAXTER }

BELINDA (*dropping her eyes modestly*) But this is England

BAXTER Mrs Tremayne, I claim the right of age—of my greater years—to speak first

BELINDA (*kindly to DEVENISH*) You can speak afterwards, Mr Devenish It's so awkward when you both speak together

BAXTER Mrs Tremayne, I am a man of substantial position, and perhaps I may say of some repute in serious circles All that I have, whether of material or mental endowment, I lay at your feet, together with an admiration which I cannot readily put into words As my wife I

think you would be happy, and I feel that with you by my side I could achieve even greater things

BELINDA How sweet of you ! But I ought to tell you that I'm no good at figures

DEVENISH (*protesting*) My lady—

BELINDA : I don't mean what you mean, Mr Devenish
You wait till it's your turn (*To BAXTER*) Yes ?

BAXTER I ask you to marry me, Belinda

BELINDA (*settling herself happily and closing her eyes*)
O-oh ! Now it's *your* turn, Mr Devenish

DEVENISH (*excitedly*) Money—thank Heaven, I have no money
Reputation—thank Heaven, I have no reputation
What can I offer you ? Dreams—nothing but dreams
Come with me and I will show you the world through my dreams
What can I give you ? Youth, freedom, beauty—

BAXTER Debts

BELINDA (*still with her eyes shut*) You mustn't interrupt,
Mr Baxter

DEVENISH Belinda, marry me and I will open your eyes
to the beauty of the world Come to me !

BELINDA (*happily*) O-oh ! You've got such different
ways of putting things How can I choose between you ?

DEVENISH Then you will marry one of us ?

BELINDA You know I really *oughtn't* to.

BAXTER I don't see why not

BELINDA Well, there's just a little difficulty in the way

DEVENISH What is it ? I will remove it For you I
could remove anything—yes, even Baxter (*He looks at*
BAXTER, *who is sitting more solidly than ever in his chair*)

BELINDA And anyhow I should have to choose between
you.

DEVENISH (*in a whisper*) Choose me

BAXTER (*stiffly*) Mrs Tremayne does not require any
prompting A fair field and let the best man win

DEVENISH (*going across and slapping the astonished*
BAXTER *on the back*). Ay, let the best man win ! Well
spoken, Baxter (*To BELINDA*) Send us out into the world
upon some knightly quest, lady, and let the victor be
rewarded.

BAXTER I—er—ought to say that I should be unable

to go very far. I have an engagement to speak at Newcastle on the 21st

DEVENISH Baxter, I will take no unfair advantage of you. Let the beard of the Lord Mayor of Newcastle be the talisman that my lady demands, I am satisfied

BAXTER This sort of thing is entirely contrary to my usual mode of life, but I will not be out faced by a mere boy (*Slamming his bowler-hat on the table*) I am prepared

DEVENISH Speak, lady

BELINDA (*speaking in a deep mysterious voice*) Gentlemen, ye put wild thoughts into my head. In sooth, I am minded to send ye forth upon a quest that is passing strange. Know ye that there is a maid journeyed hither, hight Robinson—whose—(*in her natural voice*) what's the old for aunt?

BAXTER (*hopefully*) Mother's sister

BELINDA You know, I think I shall have to explain this in ordinary language. You won't mind very much, will you, Mr Devenish?

DEVENISH It is the spirit of this which matters, not the language which clothes it

BELINDA Oh, I'm so glad you think so. Well, now about Miss Robinson. She's my niece and she's just come to stay with me, and—poor girl—she's lost her father. Absolutely lost him. He disappeared ever such a long time ago, and poor Miss Robinson—Delia—naturally wants to find him. Poor girl! she can't think where he is

DEVENISH (*nobly*) I will find him

BELINDA Oh, thank you, Mr Devenish, Miss Robinson would be so much obliged

BAXTER What have we to go upon? Beyond the fact that his name is Robinson—

BELINDA I shouldn't go on that too much. You see, he may easily have changed it by now. He was never very much of a Robinson. Nothing to do with Peter or any of those

DEVENISH I will find him

BAXTER Well, can you tell us what he's like?

BELINDA Well, it's such a long time since I saw him (*Looking down modestly*) Of course, I was quite a girl then. The only thing I know for certain is that he has a mole

on his left arm about here (*She indicates a spot just below the elbow*)

DEVENISH (*folding his arms and looking nobly upwards*)
I will find him

BAXTER I am bound to inform you, Mrs Tremayne, that even a trained detective could not give you very much hope in such a case. However, I will keep a look-out for him, and, of course, if——

DEVENISH Fear not, lady, I will find him

BAXTER (*annoyed*) Yes, you keep on saying that, but what have you got to go on?

DEVENISH (*grandly*) Faith! The faith which moves mountains

BELINDA Yes, and this is only just one small mole-hill, Mr Baxter

BAXTER Yes, but still——

BELINDA S'sh! here is Miss Robinson. If Mr Devenish will hold the hammock while I alight—we don't want an accident—I can introduce you (*He helps her to get out*) Thank you. Delia darling, this is Mr. Baxter—and Mr Devenish. My niece, Miss Robinson——

DELIA How do you do?

BELINDA Miss Robinson has just come over from France *Mon Dieu, quel pays!*

BAXTER I hope you had a good crossing, Miss Robinson

DELIA Oh, I never mind about the crossing. Aunt Belinda—— (*She stops and smiles*)

BELINDA Yes, dear?

DELIA I believe tea is almost ready. I want mine, and I'm sure Mr Baxter's hungry. Mr Devenish scorns food, I expect

DEVENISH (*hurt*) Why do you say that?

DELIA Aren't you a poet?

BELINDA Yes, darling, but that doesn't prevent him eating. He'll be absolutely lyrical over Betty's sandwiches

DEVENISH You won't deny me that inspiration, I hope, Miss Robinson

BELINDA. Well, let's go and see what they're like (*DELIA and DEVENISH begin to move towards the house*) Mr. Baxter, just a moment

BAXTER Yes?

BELINDA (*secretly*). Not a word to her about Mr Robinson. It must be a surprise for her.

BAXTER Quite so, I understand.

BELINDA That's right (*Raising her voice*) Oh, Mr. Devenish.

DEVENISH Yes, Mrs Tremayne? (*He comes back*)

BELINDA (*secretly*) Not a word to her about Mr. Robinson. It must be a surprise for her.

DEVENISH Of course! I shouldn't dream— (*Indignantly*) Robinson! What an unsuitable name!

[BAXTER and DELIA are just going into the house]

BELINDA (*dismissing DEVENISH*) All right, I'll catch you up.

[DEVENISH goes after the other two.]

(*Left alone, BELINDA laughs happily to herself, and then begins to look rather aimlessly about her. She comes to the hammock, picks out her handkerchief, says, "Ah, there you are!" and puts it away. She goes slowly back to the house, turns her head just as she comes to the door, and comes slowly back again. She stops at the table looking down the garden.*)

BELINDA (*to herself*) Have you lost yourself, or something? No, the latch is this side. Yes, that's right.

TREMAYNE comes in. He has been knocking about the world for eighteen years, and is very much a man, though he has kept his manners. His hair is greying a little at the sides, and he looks the forty-odd that he is. Without his moustache and beard he is very different from the boy BELINDA married.

TREMAYNE (*with his hat in his hand*) I'm afraid I'm trespassing.

BELINDA (*winningly*) But it's such a pretty garden, isn't it?

TREMAYNE (*rather confused*) I—I beg your pardon, I—er—

(*He is wondering if it can possibly be she. BELINDA thinks his confusion is due to the fact that he is trespassing, and hastens to put him at his ease.*)

BELINDA I should have done the same myself, you know.

TREMAYNE (*pulling himself together*). Oh, but you mustn't think I just came in because I liked the garden—

BELINDA (*clapping her hands*) No, but say you do like it, quick

TREMAINE It's lovely and—— (*He hesitates*)

BELINDA (*hopefully*) Yes?

TREMAINE (*with conviction*) Yes, it's lovely

BELINDA (*with that happy sigh of hers*) O-oh! Now tell me what really did happen?

TREMAINE I was on my way to Marytown——

BELINDA To where?

TREMAINE Marytown

BELINDA Oh, you mean Mariton

TREMAINE Do I?

BELINDA Yes, we always call it Mariton down here (*Earnestly*) You don't mind, do you?

TREMAINE (*smiling*) Not a bit

BELINDA Just say it—to see if you've got it right

TREMAINE Mariton

BELINDA (*shaking her head*) Oh no, that's quite wrong Try it again (*With a rustic accent*) Mariton

TREMAINE Mariton

BELINDA Yes, that's much better (*As if it were he who had interrupted*) Well, do go on

TREMAINE I'm afraid it isn't much of an apology really I saw what looked like a private road, but what I rather hoped wasn't, and—well, I thought I'd risk it I do hope you'll forgive me

BELINDA Oh, but I love people seeing my garden Are you staying in Mariton?

TREMAINE I think so Oh yes, decidedly.

BELINDA Well, perhaps the next time the road won't feel so private

TREMAINE How charming of you! (*He feels he must know*) Are you Mrs Tremayne by any chance?

BELINDA Yes

TREMAINE (*nodding to himself*) Yes

BELINDA How did you know?

TREMAINE (*hastily inventing*) They use you as a sign-post in the village Past Mrs Tremayne's house and then bear to the left——

BELINDA And you couldn't go past it?

TREMAINE I'm afraid I couldn't Thank you so much

for not minding Well, I must be getting on, I have trespassed quite enough

BELINDA (*regretfully*) And you haven't really seen the garden yet

TREMAINE If you won't mind my going on this way, I shall see some more on my way out

BELINDA Please do It likes being looked at (*With the faintest suggestion of demureness*) All pretty things do

TREMAINE Thank you very much Er— (*He hesitates*)

BELINDA (*helpfully*) Yes?

TREMAINE I wonder if you'd mind very much if I called one day to thank you formally for the lesson you gave me in pronunciation?

BELINDA (*gravely*) Yes, I almost think you ought to I think it's the correct thing to do

TREMAINE (*contentedly*) Thank you very much, Mrs Tremayne

BELINDA You'll come in quite formally by the front-door next time, won't you, because—because that seems the only chance of my getting to know your name

TREMAINE Oh, I beg your pardon My name is—er—er—Robinson

BELINDA (*laughing*) How very odd!

TREMAINE (*startled*) Odd?

BELINDA Yes, we have someone called Robinson staying in the house I wonder if she's any relation?

TREMAINE (*hastily*) Oh no, no No, she couldn't be I have no relations called Robinson—not to speak of

BELINDA (*holding out her hand*). You must tell me all about your relations when you come and call, Mr. Robinson

TREMAINE I think we can find something better worth talking about than that

BELINDA Do you think so? (*He says "Yes" with his eyes, bows, and goes off down the garden. BELINDA stays looking after him, and then gives that happy sigh of hers, only even more so*) O-oh!

Enter BETTY

BETTY If you please, ma'am, Miss Delia says, are you coming in to tea?

BELINDA (*looking straight in front of her, and taking no notice of BETTY, in a happy, dreamy voice*) Betty about callers If Mr Robinson calls—he's the handsome gentleman who hasn't been here before—you will say, "Not at home" And he will say, "Oh!" And you will say, "I beg your pardon, sir, was it Mr Robinson?" And he will say, "Yes!" And you will say, "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir——" (*Almost as if she were BETTY, she begins to move towards the house*) "This way——" (*she would be smiling an invitation over her shoulder to MR ROBINSON, if he were there, and she were BETTY*)—"please!" (*And the abandoned woman goes in to tea*)

ACT II

It is morning in BLINDA'S hall, a low-roofed, oak-beamed place, comfortably furnished as a sitting-room. There is an inner and an outer front-door, both of which are open.

DEVENISH, who has just rung the bell, is waiting with a bouquet of violets between the two. Midway on the right is a door leading to a small room where hats and coats are kept. A door on the left leads towards the living-rooms.

BETTY Good-morning, sir

DEVENISH Good-morning. I am afraid this is an uncereemonious hour for a call, but my sense of beauty urged me hither in defiance of convention.

BETTY Yes, sir

DEVENISH (*holding up his bouquet to BETTY*) See, the dew is yet lingering upon them, how could I let them wait until this afternoon?

BETTY Yes, sir, but I think the mistress is out.

DEVENISH They are not for your mistress, they are for Miss Delia.

BETTY Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. If you will come in, I'll see if I can find her. (*She brings him in and goes away to find DELIA.*)

(DEVENISH tries a number of poses about the room for himself and his bouquet, and finally selects one against the right side of the door by which he has just come in.)

Enter DELIA from the door on the left.

DELIA Oh, good-morning, Mr Devenish I'm afraid my-er—aunt is out

DEVENISH I know, Miss Delia, I know

DELIA She'll be so sorry to have missed you It is her day for you, isn't it ?

DEVENISH Her day for me ?

DELIA Yes, Mr Baxter generally comes to-morrow, doesn't he ?

DEVENISH Miss Delia, if our friendship is to progress at all, it can only be on the distinct understanding that I take no interest whatever in Mr Baxter's movements

DELIA Oh, I'm so sorry, I thought you knew What lovely flowers ! Are they for my aunt ?

DEVENISH To whom does one bring violets ? To modest, shrinking, tender youth

DELIA I don't think we have anybody here like that

DEVENISH (*with a bow*) Miss Delia, they are for you

DELIA Oh, how nice of you ! But I'm afraid I oughtn't to take them from you under false pretences, I don't shrink

DEVENISH A fanciful way of putting it, perhaps They are none the less for you

DELIA Well, it's awfully kind of you I'm afraid I'm not a very romantic person Aunt Belinda does all the romancing in our family

DEVENISH Your aunt is a very remarkable woman

DELIA She is Don't you dare to say a word against her

DEVENISH My dear Miss Delia, nothing could be further from my thoughts Why, am I not indebted to her for that great happiness which has come to me in these last few days ?

DELIA (*surprised*) Good gracious ! and I didn't know anything about it But what about poor Mr Baxter ?

DEVENISH (*stiffly*) I must beg that Mr Baxter's name be kept out of our conversation

DELIA But I thought Mr Baxter and you—do tell me what's happened I seem to have lost myself

DEVENISH What has happened, Miss Delia, is that I have learnt at last the secret that my heart has been striving to tell me for weeks past As soon as I saw that gracious lady, your aunt, I knew that I was in love Foolishly I took it for granted that it was she for whom my heart was

thrilling How mistaken I was ! Directly you came, you opened my eyes, and now—

DELIA Mr Devenish, you don't say you're proposing to me ?

DEVENISH I am I feel sure I am Delia, I love you

DELIA How exciting of you !

DEVENISH (*with a modest shrug*) It's nothing, I am a poet

DELIA You really want to marry me ?

DEVENISH Such is my earnest wish

DELIA But what about my aunt ?

DEVENISH (*simply*) She will be my aunt-in-law

DELIA She'll be rather surprised

DEVENISH Delia, I will be frank with you I admit that I made Mrs Tremayne an offer of marriage

DELIA (*excitedly*) You really did ? Was it that first afternoon I came ?

DEVENISH Yes

DELIA Oh, I wish I'd been there !

DEVENISH (*with dignity*) It is not my custom to propose in the presence of a third party It is true that on the occasion you mention a man called Baxter was on the lawn, but I regarded him no more than the old apple-tree or the flower-beds, or any other of the fixtures

DELIA What did she say ?

DEVENISH She accepted me conditionally

DELIA Oh, do tell me !

DEVENISH It is rather an unhappy story This man called Baxter in his vulgar way also made a proposal of marriage Mrs Tremayne was gracious enough to imply that she would marry whichever one of us fulfilled a certain condition

DELIA How sweet of her !

DEVENISH It is my earnest hope, Miss Delia, that the man called Baxter will be the victor As far as is consistent with honour, I shall endeavour to let Mr Baxter win

DELIA What was the condition ?

DEVENISH That I am not at liberty to tell It is, I understand, to be a surprise for you

DELIA How exciting ! Mr Devenish, you have been very frank. May I be equally so ? (DEVENISH bows) Why do you wear your hair so long ?

DEVENISH (*pleased*) You have noticed it ?

DELIA Well yes, I have

DEVENISH I wear it so to express my contempt for the conventions of so-called society

DELIA I always thought that people wore it very very short if they despised the conventions of society

DEVENISH I think that the mere fact that my hair annoys Mr Baxter is sufficient justification for its length

DELIA But if it annoys me too ?

DEVENISH (*heroically*) It shall go

DELIA (*apologetically*) I told you I wasn't a very romantic person, didn't I ? (*Kindly*) You can always grow it again if you fall in love with somebody else

DEVENISH That is cruel of you, Delia I shall never fall in love again

Enter BELINDA in a hat

BELINDA Why, it's Mr Devenish ! How nice of you to come so early in the morning ! How is Mr Baxter ?

DEVENISH I do not know, Mrs Tremayne

BELINDA (*to DELIA*) I got most of the things, Delia (*To DEVENISH*) "The things," Mr Devenish, is my rather stuffy way of referring to all the delightful poems that you are going to eat to-night

DEVENISH I am looking forward to it immensely, Mrs Tremayne

BELINDA I do hope I've got all your and Mr Baxter's favourite dishes

DEVENISH I'm afraid Mr Baxter and I are not likely to appreciate the same things

BELINDA (*coolly*) Oh, Mr Devenish ! And you were so unanimous a few days ago

DELIA I think Mr Devenish was referring entirely to things to eat

BELINDA I felt quite sad when I was buying the lamb cutlets To think that, only a few days before, they had been frisking about with their mammas, and having poems written about them by Mr Devenish There ! I'm giving away the whole dinner Delia take him away before I tell him any more. We must keep some surprises for him

DELIA (*to DEVENISH as she picks up the flowers*) Come along, we'll just put these in water first

BELINDA (*wickedly*) Are those my flowers, Mr Devenish?

DEVENISH (*after a little hesitation, with a bow which might refer to either of them*) They are for the most beautiful lady in the land

BELINDA Oh, how nice of you!

[DEVENISH follows DELIA out through the door on the left]

BELINDA (*unpinning her hat before a mirror*) I suppose he means Delia—bless them! (*She gives a few pats to her hair and then walks about the room singing softly to herself. She goes to the front-door and looks happily out into the garden. Suddenly she sees MR BAXTER approaching. She hurries back into a chair and pretends to be very busy reading.*)

BAXTER (*rather nervously*)—*Cl*—may I come in, Mrs Tremayne?

BELINDA (*dropping her book and turning round with a violent start*) Oh, Mr Baxter, how you surprised me! (*She puts her hand to her heart.*)

BAXTER I must apologize for intruding upon you at this hour, Mrs. Tremayne

BELINDA (*holding up her hand*) Stop!

BAXTER (*startled*) What?

BELINDA I cannot let you come in like that

BAXTER (*looking down at himself*) Like what?

BELINDA (*dropping her eyes*) You called me Belinda once

BAXTER (*coming into the room*) May I explain my position, Mrs Tremayne?

BELINDA Before you begin—have you seen much of my niece lately?

BAXTER (*surprised*) No

BELINDA Oh! (*Sweetly*) Please go on

BAXTER Why, is *she* lost too?

BELINDA Oh no, I just— Do sit down Let me put your hat down somewhere for you

BAXTER (*keeping it firmly in his hand, and sitting down on the sofa*). It will be all right here, thank you

BELINDA (*returning to her chair*) I'm dying to hear what you are going to say.

BAXTER First as regards the use of your Christian name I felt that, as a man of honour, I could not permit myself

to use it until I had established my right over that of Mr Devenish

BELINDA All my friends call me Belinda

BAXTER As between myself and Mr Devenish the case is somewhat different Until one of us is successful over the other in the quest upon which you have sent us, I feel that as far as possible we should hold aloof from you

BELINDA (*pleadingly*) Just say "Belinda" once more, in case you're a long time

BAXTER (*very formally*) Belinda

BELINDA How nicely you say it—Harold

BAXTER (*half getting out of his seat*) Mrs Tiemayne, I must not listen to this

BELINDA (*meekly*) I won't offend again, Mr Baxter Please go on. Tell me about the quest, are you winning?

BAXTER I am progressing, Mrs Tremayne Indeed, I came here this morning to acquaint you with the results of my investigations Yesterday I located a man called Robinson working upon a farm close by I ventured to ask him if he had any marks upon him by which he could be recognized He adopted a threatening attitude, and replied that if I wanted any he could give me some With the aid of half a crown I managed to placate him, and was thus enabled to resume my investigations Putting my inquiry in another form, I asked if he had any mo'es A regrettable misunderstanding, which led to a fruitless journey to another part of the village, was eventually cleared up, and on my return I satisfied myself that this man was in no way related to your niece

BELINDA (*admiringly*) How splendid of you! Well, now, we know *he's* not (*She holds up one finger*)

BAXTER In the afternoon I located another Mr Robinson following the profession of a carrier My first inquiries led to a similar result, with the exception that in this case Mr Robinson carried his threatening attitude so far as to take off his coat and roll up his sleeves. Perceiving at once that he was not the man, I withdrew

BELINDA How brave you are! That makes two (*She holds up another finger*) It still leaves a good many (*Pleadingly*) Just call me Belinda again

BAXTER (*nervously*) You mustn't tempt me, Mrs Tremayne

BELINDA (*penitently*) I won't

BAXTER To resume, then, my narrative This morning I have heard of a third Mr Robinson Whether there is actually any particular fortune attached to the number three I cannot say for certain It is doubtful whether statistics would be found to support the popular belief But one likes to flatter oneself that in one's own case it may be true, and so——

BELINDA And so the third Mr Robinson——

BAXTER Something for which I cannot altogether account inspires me with hope He is, I have discovered, staying at Mariton This afternoon I go to look for him

BELINDA (*to herself*) Mariton! How funny! I wonder if it's the same one

BAXTER What one?

BELINDA Oh just one of the ones (*Gratefully*) Mr Baxter, you are doing all this for *me*

BAXTER Pray do not mention it I don't know if it's Devonshire, or the time of the year, or the sort of atmosphere you create, Mrs Tremayne, but I feel an entirely different man There is something in the air which—yes I shall certainly go over to Mariton this afternoon

BELINDA (*gravely*) I have had the same feeling sometimes Mr Baxter I am not always the staid respectable matron which I appear to you to be Sometimes I——
(*She looks absently at the watch on her wrist*) Good gracious!

BAXTER (*alarmed*) What is it?

BELINDA (*looking anxiously from the door to him*) Mr Baxter, I'm going to throw myself on your mercy

BAXTER My dear Mrs Tremayne——

BELINDA (*looking at her watch again*) A strange man will be here directly He must not find you with me

BAXTER (*rising*) A man?

BELINDA Yes, yes, a man! He is pursuing me with his attentions If he found you here, there would be a terrible scene

BAXTER I will defend you from him

BELINDA No, no He is a big man He will—he will overpower you

BAXTER But you—

BELINDA I can defend myself I will send him away
But he must not find you here You must hide before he
overpowers you

BAXTER (*with dignity*) I will withdraw if you wish it

BELINDA No, not withdraw, hide He might see you
withdrawing (*Leading the way to a door on the right*)
Quick, in here

BAXTER (*embarrassed at the thought that this sort of thing
really only happens in a bedroom farce*) I don't think I
quite—

BELINDA (*reassuring him*) It's perfectly respectable it's
where we keep the umbrellas (*She takes him by the hand*)

BAXTER (*still resisting*) I'm not at all sure that I—

BELINDA (*earnestly*) Oh, but don't you see what *trust*
I'm putting in you? Some people are so nervous about
their umbrellas

BAXTER Well, of course, if you—but I don't see why I
shouldn't just slip out of the door before he comes

BELINDA (*reproachfully*) Of course, if you grudge me
every little pleasure— Quick! Here he is

(*She bundles him through the door, and with a sigh of
happiness comes back and looks at herself in the
mirror She goes to the front door, waves her
hand to somebody in the distance, and comes into
the hall again Seeing MR BAXTER'S bowler
hat on the sofa, she carries it across to his door,
knocks, hands it in to him, saying "Your hat,
S'sh!" and returns to her chair TREMAYNE
comes in*)

TREMAYNE (*at the door*) It's no good your pretending
to be surprised, because you said I could come

BELINDA (*welcoming him*) But I can still be surprised that
you wanted to come

TREMAYNE Oh, no, you aren't

BELINDA (*marking it off on her fingers*) Just a little bit—
that much

TREMAYNE It would be much more surprising if I hadn't
come

BELINDA (*sitting down on the sofa*) It is a pretty garden,
isn't it?

TREMAYNE (*sitting down next to her*) You forget that I saw the garden yesterday

BELINDA Oh, but the things have grown so much since then Let me see, this is the third day you've been and we only met three days ago And then you're coming to dinner again to-night

TREMAYNE (*eagerly*) Am I ?

BELINDA Yes Haven't you been asked ?

TREMAYNE No, not a word

BELINDA Yes, that's quite right, I remember now, I only thought of it this morning, so I couldn't ask you before, could I ?

TREMAYNE (*earnestly*) What made you think of it then ?

BELINDA (*romantically*) It was at the butcher's There was one little lamb cutlet left over and sitting out all by itself, and there was nobody to love it And I said to myself, suddenly, " I know, that will do for Mr Robinson " (*Prosaically*) I do hope you like lamb ?

TREMAYNE I adore it

BELINDA Oh, I'm so glad ! When I saw it sitting there I thought you'd love it I'm afraid I can't tell you any more about the rest of the dinner, because I wouldn't tell Mr Devenish, and I want to be fair

TREMAYNE Who's Mr Devenish ?

BELINDA Oh, haven't you met him ? He's always coming here

TREMAYNE Is he in love with you too ?

BELINDA Too ? Oh, you mean Mr Baxter

TREMAYNE Confound it, that's three !

BELINDA (*innocently*) Three ? (*She looks up at him and down again*)

TREMAYNE Who is Mr Baxter ?

BELINDA Oh, haven't you met him ? He's always coming here

TREMAYNE Who is Mr Baxter ?

BELINDA Oh, he's a sort of statistician Isn't that a horrid word to say ? So stishany

TREMAYNE What does he make statistics about ?

BELINDA Oh, umbrellas and things. Don't let's talk about him

TREMAINE All right, then, who is Mr Devenish?

BELINDA Oh, he's a poet (*She throws up her eyes and sighs deeply*) Ah me!

TREMAINE What does he write poetry about? (BELINDA looks at him, and down again, and then at him again, and then down, and gives a little sigh—all of which means, "Can't you guess?") What does he write poetry about?

BELINDA (*obediently*) He wrote "The Lute of Love and other Poems, by Claude Devenish" The Lute of Love—— (*To herself*) I haven't been saying that lately (*With great expression*) The Lute of Love—the Lute (*She pats her mouth back*)

TREMAINE And what is Mr Devenish——

BELINDA (*putting her hand on his sleeve*) You'll let me know when it's my turn, won't you?

TREMAINE Your turn?

BELINDA Yes, to ask questions I love this game—it's like clumps (*She crosses her hands on her lap and waits for the next question*)

TREMAINE I beg your pardon I—er—of course have no right to cross-examine you like this

BELINDA Oh, do go on, I love it (*With childish excitement*) I've got my question ready

TREMAINE (*smiling*) I think perhaps it is your turn

BELINDA (*eagerly*) Is it really? (*He nods*) Well then—who is Mr Robinson?

TREMAINE (*alarmed*) What?

BELINDA I think it's a fair question I met you three days ago and you told me you were staying at Mariton Mariton You can say it all right now, can't you?

TREMAINE I think so

BELINDA (*coaxingly*) Just say it

TREMAINE Mariton

BELINDA (*clapping her hands*) Lovely! I don't think any of the villagers do it as well as that

TREMAINE Well?

BELINDA Well, that was three days ago You came the next day to see the garden, and you came the day after to see the garden, and you've come this morning—to see the garden, and you're coming to dinner to-night, and it's so lovely, we shall simply have to go into the garden after-

wards And all I know about you is that you *haven't* any relations called Robinson

TREMAYNE What do I know about Mrs Tremayne but that she *has* a relation called Robinson?

BELINDA And two dear friends called Devenish and Baxter

TREMAYNE (*annoyed*) I was forgetting them

BELINDA (*to herself*) I mustn't forget Mr Baxter

TREMAYNE (*getting up*) But what does it matter? What would it matter if I knew nothing about you? I know everything about you—everything that matters

BELINDA (*closing her eyes contentedly*) Tell me some of them

TREMAYNE (*earnestly*) Belinda—

BELINDA (*still with her eyes shut*) He's going to propose to me I can feel it coming

TREMAYNE Confound it! how many men *have* proposed to you?

BELINDA (*surprised*) Since when?

TREMAYNE Since your first husband proposed to you

BELINDA Oh, I thought you meant this year Well now, let me see (*Slowly and thoughtfully*) One (*She pushes up her first finger*) Two (*She pushes up the second*) Three (*She pushes up the third finger, holds it there for a moment and then pushes it gently down again*) No, I don't think that one ought to count really (*She pushes up two more fingers and the thumb*) Three, four, five—do you want the names or just the total?

TREMAYNE This is horrible

BELINDA (*innocently*) But anybody can propose Now if you'd asked how many I'd accepted— Let me see, where was I up to? I shan't count yours, because I haven't really had it yet Six, seven— Yes, Betty, what is it?

BETTY *has just come in from the door on the left*

BETTY If you please, ma'am, cook would like to speak to you for a minute

BELINDA (*getting up*) Yes, I'll come (*To TREMAYNE*) You'll forgive me, won't you? You'll find some cigarettes there (*She starts to go, but comes back and adds*

confidentially) It's probably about the lamb cutlets, I expect your little one refuses to be cooked

[She goes out after BETTY]

(Left alone, TREMAYNE stalks moodily about the room, occasionally kicking things which come in his way. He takes up his hat suddenly and goes towards the door, stops irresolutely and comes back. He is standing in the middle of the room with his hands in his pockets when DEVENISH comes in from the door on the left.)

DEVENISH *(surprised)* Hullo!

TREMAYNE Hullo! Are you Mr Devenish?

DEVENISH Yes

TREMAYNE Devenish the poet?

DEVENISH *(coming up and shaking him warmly by the hand)* My dear fellow, you know my work?

TREMAYNE *(grimly)* My dear Mr Devenish, your name is most familiar to me

DEVENISH I congratulate you. I thought your great-grandchildren would be the first to hear of me

TREMAYNE My name's Robinson, by the way

DEVENISH Then let me return the compliment, Robinson. Your name is familiar to me

TREMAYNE *(hastily)* I don't think I'm related to any Robinsons you know

DEVENISH Well, no, I suppose not. When I was very much younger I began a collection of Robinsons. Actually it was only three days ago, but it seems much longer. Many things have happened since then.

TREMAYNE *(uninterested)* Really?

DEVENISH There is a man called Baxter who is still collecting, I believe. For myself, I am only interested in one of the great family—Delia

TREMAYNE *(eagerly)* You are interested in her?

DEVENISH Devotedly. In fact, I am at this moment waiting for her to put on her hat

TREMAYNE *(warmly)* My dear Devenish, I am delighted to make your acquaintance. *(He seizes his hand and grips it heartily.)* How are you?

DEVENISH *(feeling his fingers)* Fairly well, thanks

TREMAYNE That's right. *(They sit on the sofa together.)*

DEVENISH (*still nursing his hand*) You are a very lucky man, Robinson

TRIMAYNE In what way ?

DEVENISH People you meet must be so very reluctant to say good-bye to you Have you ever tried strangling lions or anything like that ?

TRIMAYNE (*with a laugh*) Well, as a matter of fact, I have

DEVENISH I suppose you won all right ?

TRIMAYNE In the end, with the help of my beater

DEVENISH Personally I should have backed you alone against any two ordinary lions

TRIMAYNE One was quite enough As it was, he gave me something to remember him by (*Pulling up his left sleeve, he displays a deep scar*)

DEVENISH (*looking at it casually*) By Jove, that's a nasty one ! (*He suddenly catches sight of the mole and stares at it fascinated*) Good heavens !

TRIMAYNE What's the matter ?

DEVENISH (*claspng his head*) Wait Let me think (*After a pause*) Have you ever met a man called Baxter ?

TRIMAYNE No

DEVENISH Would you like to ?

TRIMAYNE (*grimly*) Very much indeed

DEVENISH He's the man I told you about who's interested in Robinsons He'll be delighted to meet you (*With a nervous laugh*) Funny thing, he's rather an authority on lions You must show him that scar of yours, it will intrigue him immensely (*Earnestly*) Don't shake hands with him too heartily just at first, it might put him off the whole thing

TRIMAYNE This Mr Baxter seems to be a curious man

DEVENISH (*absently*) Yes, he is rather odd (*Looking at his watch*) I wonder if I——(*To TRIMAYNE*) I suppose you won't be—— (*He stops suddenly A slight tapping noise comes from the room where they keep umbrellas*)

TRIMAYNE What's that ?

(*The tapping noise is repeated, a little more loudly this time*)

DEVENISH Come in

(*The door opens and BAXTER comes in nervously, holding his bowler-hat in his hand.*)

BAXTER Oh, I just—(TREMAYNE *stands up*)—I just—
(*He goes back again*)

DEVENISH (*springing across the room*) Baxter! (*The door opens nervously again and BAXTER's head appears round it*) Come in, Baxter old man, you're just the very person I wanted (BAXTER *comes in carefully*) Good man (To TREMAYNE) This is Mr Baxter that I was telling you about

TREMAYNE (*much relieved at the appearance of his rival*). Oh, is this Mr Baxter? (*Holding out his hand with great friendliness*) How are you, Mr Baxter?

DEVENISH (*warningly*) Steady! (TREMAYNE *shakes BAXTER quite gently by the hand*) Baxter, this is Mr Robinson (*Casually*) R-o-b-i-n-s-o-n (*He looks sideways at BAXTER to see how he takes it BAXTER is noticeably impressed*)

BAXTER Really? I am very glad to meet you, sir

TREMAYNE Very good of you to say so

DEVENISH (to BAXTER) Robinson is a great big-game hunter

BAXTER Indeed? I have never done anything in that way myself, but I'm sure it must be an absorbing pursuit

TREMAYNE Oh, well, it's something to do

DEVENISH (to BAXTER) You must get him to tell you about a wrestle he had with a lion once Extraordinary story! (*Looking at his watch suddenly*) Jove! I must be off See you again, Baxter Good-bye, Robinson No, don't shake hands I'm in a hurry

[*He looks at his watch again and goes out hurriedly by the door on the left*]

(TREMAYNE and BAXTER *sit down together on the sofa*)

TREMAYNE Unusual man, your friend Devenish I suppose it comes of being a poet

BAXTER I have no great liking for Mr Devenish—

TREMAYNE Oh, he's all right

BAXTER But I am sure that if he is impressed by anything outside himself or his own works, it must be something rather remarkable Pray tell me of your adventure with the lion

TREMAYNE (*laughing*). Really, you mustn't think that I

go about telling everybody my adventures. It just happened to come up. I'm afraid I shook his hand rather more warmly than I meant, and he asked me if I'd ever tried strangling lions. That was all.

BAXTER And had you?

TREMAINE Well, it just happened that I had.

BAXTER Indeed? You came off scathless, I trust?

TREMAINE (*carelessly indicating his arm*) Well, he got me one across there.

BAXTER (*obviously excited*) Really, really? One across there? Not bad, I hope?

TREMAINE (*laughing*) Well, it doesn't show unless I do that. (*He pulls up his sleeve carelessly and BAXTER bends eagerly over his arm*)

BAXTER Good heavens! I've found it!

TREMAINE Found what? (*He pulls down his sleeve*)

BAXTER I must see Mr. Tremayne. Where's Mr. Tremayne?

TREMAINE She went out just now. What's the matter?

BAXTER Out? I must find her. This is a matter of life and death.

[*He seizes his hat and hurries out by the front door. (TREMAINE stares after him in amazement. Then he pulls up his sleeve, looks at his scar again and shakes his head. While he is still puzzling over it, BELINDA comes back.)*

BELINDA Such a to-do in the kitchen! The cook's given notice—at least she will directly—and your lamb cutlet, slipped back to the shop when nobody was looking, and I've got to go into the village again, and oh dear! oh dear, I have such a lot of things to do. (*Looking across at MR. BAXTER'S door*) Oh yes, that's another one. Mr. Robinson, you will have to leave me. Farewell.

TREMAINE Belinda—

BELINDA No, not even Belinda. Wait till this evening.

TREMAINE I have a thousand things to say to you, I shall say them this evening.

BELINDA (*giving him her hand*) Begin about eight o'clock. Good-bye till then.

[*He takes her hand, looks at her for a moment, then suddenly bends and kisses it, and hurries out.*

(BELINDA stands looking from her hand to him, gives a little wondering exclamation and then presses the back of her hand against her cheek. She turns back, and remembers MR BAXTER again. With a smile she goes to the door and taps gently)

BELINDA Mr Baxter, Mr Baxter, you may come in now, he has withdrawn. I have unhanded him. (She opens the door and finds the room empty) Oh!

BAXTER comes in at the front-door

BAXTER Ah, there you are!

BELINDA (turning with a start) Oh, how you frightened me, Mr Baxter! I couldn't think what had happened to you. I thought perhaps you'd been eaten up by one of the umbrellas.

BAXTER Mrs Tremayne, I have some wonderful news for you. I have found Miss Robinson's father.

BELINDA (hardly understanding) Miss Robinson's father?

BAXTER Yes. Mr Robinson.

BELINDA Oh, you mean—— Oh yes, he told me his name was Robinson—— Oh, but he's no relation.

BAXTER Wait! I saw his arm. By a subterfuge I managed to see his arm.

BELINDA (her eyes opening more and more widely as she begins to realize) You saw——

BAXTER I saw the mole.

BELINDA (faintly as she holds out her own arm) Show me.

BAXTER (very decorously indicating) There!

(BELINDA holds the place with her other hand, and still looking at MR. BAXTER, slowly begins to laugh—half-laughter, half-tears, wonderingly, happily, contentedly)

BELINDA. And I didn't know!

BAXTER Mrs Tremayne, I am delighted to have done this service for your niece——

BELINDA (to herself) Of course, he knew all the time.

BAXTER (to the world) Still more am I delighted to have gained the victory over Mr Devenish in his enterprise.

BELINDA Eighteen years—but I ought to have known.

BAXTER (at large) I shall not be accused of exaggerating when I say that the odds against such an enterprise were enormous.

BELINDA Eighteen years—— And now I've eight whole hours to wait !

BAXTER (*triumphantly*) It will be announced to-night Mr Devenish," I shall say, "young fellow——" (*He arranges his speech in his mind*)

BELINDA So I was right, after all ! He *does* look better without a beard !

BAXTER (*making his speech*) "Mr Devenish, young fellow, when you matched yourself against a man of my repute, when you matched yourself against a man—— (*BELINDA has slipped out, to enjoy her happiness alone*)—— "who has read papers at soirees of the Royal Statistical Society, when——er——"

[*He looks round and discovers to his amazement that he is alone He claps on his bowler-hat, gives another amazed look round, says with a shrug "Unusual," and goes out*

ACT III

It is after dinner in BELINDA'S hall BELINDA is lying on the sofa with a coffee-cup in her hand DELIA, in a chair on the right, has picked up "The Lute of Love" from a table by her side and is reading it impatiently

DELIA What rubbish he writes !

BELINDA (*coming back from her thoughts*) Who, dear ?

DELIA Claude—Mr Devenish Of course, he's very young

BELINDA So was Keats, darling

DELIA I don't think Claude has had Keats' advantages Keats started life as an apothecary

BELINDA So much nicer than a chemist

DELIA Now, Claude started with nothing to do

BELINDA (*mildly*) Do you always call him Claude, darling? I hope you aren't going to grow into a flirt like that horrid Mrs Tremayne

DELIA Silly mother ! (*Seriously*) I don't think he'll ever be any good till he really gets work Did you notice his hair this evening ?

BELINDA (*dreamily*) Whose, dear ?

DELIA Mummy, look me in the eye and tell me you are not being bad

BELINDA (*innocently*) Bad, darling ?

DELIA You've made Mr Robinson fall in love with you

BELINDA (*happily*) Have I ?

DELIA Yes, it's serious this time He's not like the other two

BELINDA However did you know that ?

DELIA Oh, I know

BELINDA Darling, I believe you've grown up It's quite time I settled down

DELIA With Mr Robinson ?

(BELINDA looks thoughtfully at DELIA for a little time and then sits up)

BELINDA (mysteriously) Are you prepared for a great secret to be revealed to you ?

DELIA (childishly) Oh, I love secrets

BELINDA (reproachfully) Darling, you mustn't take it like that This is a great deep dark secret, you'll probably need your sal volatile

DELIA (excitedly) Go on !

BELINDA Well—— (Looking round the room) Shall we have the lights down a little ?

DELIA Go on, mummy

BELINDA Well, Mr Robinson is—(impressively) is not quite the Robinson he appears to be

DELIA Yes ?

BELINDA In fact, child, he is—— Hadn't you better come over here, darling, and hold your mother's hand ?

DELIA (struggling with some emotion) Go on

BELINDA Well, Mr Robinson is a—sort of relation of yours, in fact (playing with her rings) he is your—father. (She looks up at DELIA to see how the news is being received) Dear one, this is not a matter for mirth

DELIA (coming over and kissing her) Darling, it is lovely, isn't it ? I am laughing because I am so happy

BELINDA Aren't you surprised ?

DELIA No You see, Claude told me this morning He found out just before Mr Baxter

BELINDA Well ! Everyone seems to have known except me

DELIA Didn't you see how friendly father and I got at dinner ? I thought I'd better start breaking the ice—because I suppose he'll be kissing me directly

BELINDA Say you like him

DELIA I think he's going to be awfully nice Does he know you know ? (She goes back to her seat)

BELINDA Not yet Just at present I've rather got Mr Baxter on my mind I suppose, darling, you wouldn't like

BAXTER (*indignantly to DEVENISH*) I say, you know, that's not fair. It's all very well to take your defeat like a man, but you mustn't overdo it. Mrs Tremayne, I claim the reward which I have earned.

BELINDA (*after a pause*). Mr Baxter—Mr Devenish, I have something to tell you. (*Penitently*) I have not been quite frank with you. I think you both ought to know that—I—I made a mistake. Delia is not my niece, she is my daughter.

DEVENISH Your daughter? I say, how ripping!

(BELINDA gives him an understanding look.)

BAXTER Your daughter?

BELINDA Yes.

BAXTER But—but you aren't old enough to have a daughter of that age.

BELINDA (*apologetically*) Well, there she is.

BAXTER But—but she's grown up.

BELINDA Quite.

BAXTER Then in that case you must be—— (*He hesitates, evidently working it out*)

BELINDA (*hastily*) I'm afraid so, Mr Baxter.

BAXTER But this makes a great difference. I had no idea. Why, when I'm fifty you would be——

BELINDA (*sighing*) Yes, I suppose I should.

BAXTER And when I'm sixty——

BELINDA (*pleadingly to DEVENISH*) Can't you stop him?

DEVENISH Look here, Baxter, another word from you and you'll never get to sixty.

BAXTER And then there's Miss—er—Delia. In the event of our marrying, Mrs Tremayne, she, I take it, would be my step-daughter.

BELINDA I don't think she would trouble us much, Mr Baxter. I have an idea that she will be getting married before long. (*She glances at DEVENISH, who returns her look gratefully*)

BAXTER None the less, the fact would be disturbing. I have never yet considered myself seriously as a step-father. I don't think I am going too far if I say that to some extent I have been deceived in this matter.

BELINDA (*reproachfully*) And so have I. I thought you loved me.

DEVENISH (*sympathetically*) Yes, yes

BELINDA (*turning to him suddenly*) And Mr Devenish too

BAXTER E —

DEVENISH Er——

(*They stand before her guiltily and have nothing to say*)

BELINDA (*with a shrug*) Well, I shall have to marry somebody else, that's all

BAXTER Who?

BELINDA I suppose Mr Robinson After all, if I am Delia's mother, and Mr Baxter says that Mr Robinson's her father, it's about time we *were* married

DEVENISH (*eagerly*) Mrs Tremayne, what fools we are! He is your husband all the time!

BELINDA Yes

BAXTER You've had a husband all the time?

BELINDA (*apologetically*) I lost him, it wasn't my fault

BAXTER Really, this is very confusing I don't know where I am I gather—I am to gather, it seems, that you are no longer eligible as a possible wife?

BELINDA I am afraid not, Mr Baxter

BAXTER But this is very confusing, this is very disturbing to a man of my age For weeks past I have been regarding myself as a—a possible benedict I have—ah—taken steps Only this morning, in writing to my house-keeper, I warned her that she might hear at any moment a most startling announcement

DEVENISH (*cheerfully*) Oh, that's all right That might only mean that you were getting a new bowler-hat

BAXTER (*suddenly*) Ah, and what about you, sir? How is it that you take this so lightly? (*Triumphantly*) I have it! It all becomes clear to me. He has transferred his affections to your daughter!

DEVENISH Oh, I say, Baxter, this is very crude

BELINDA And why should he not, Mr Baxter? (*Softly*) He has made me very happy

BAXTER He has made you happy, Mrs Tremayne?

BELINDA Very happy

BAXTER (*thoughtfully*) Ah! (*He takes a turn round the room in silence, and then comes back to her*) Mrs Tremayne, I have taken a great resolve. (*Solemnly*) I

also will make you happy (*Thumping his heart*) I also will woo Miss Delia (*Suddenly seizing DEVENISH's arm*) Come we will seek Miss Delia together It may be that she will send us upon another quest, in which I shall again be victorious (*Tempestuously*) Come, I say! (*He marches the resisting DEVENISH towards the door*)

DEVENISH (*to BELINDA*) Please!

BELINDA (*gently*) Mr Baxter Harold (*BAXTER stops and turns round*) You are too impetuous I think that as Delia's mother—

BAXTER Your pardon, Mrs Tremayne In the intonation of the moment I am forgetting (*Formally*) I have the honour to ask your permission to pay my addresses—

BELINDA No, no, I didn't mean that But, as Delia's mother, I ought to warn you that she is hardly fitted to take the place of your housekeeper She is not very domesticated

BAXTER (*indignantly*) Not domesticated? Why, did I not hear her tell her father at dinner that she had arranged all the flowers?

BELINDA There are other things than flowers

DEVENISH Bed-socks, for instance, Baxter It's a very tricky thing airing bed-socks I am sure your housekeeper—

BAXTER Mrs Tremayne, she will learn The daughter of such a mother . . . I need say no more

BELINDA Oh, thank you But there is something else, Mr Baxter You are not being quite fair to yourself In starting out upon this simultaneous wooing, you forget that Mr Devenish has already had his turn this morning alone You should have yours alone too

DEVENISH Oh, I say!

BAXTER Yes, yes, you are right I must introduce myself first as a suitor I see that (*To DEVENISH*) You stay here, I will go alone into the garden, and—

BELINDA It is perhaps a little cold out-of-doors for people of . . . of *our* age, Mr Baxter Now, in the library—

BAXTER (*astounded*) Library?

BELINDA Yes

BAXTER You have a library ?

BELINDA (*to DEVENISH*) He doesn't believe I have a library

DEVENISH You ought to see the library, Baxter

BAXTER But you are continually springing surprises on me this evening, Mrs Tremayne First a daughter, then a husband, and then--a library ! I have been here three weeks, and I never knew you had a library Dear me, I wonder how it is that I never saw it !

BELINDA (*modestly*) I thought you came to see *me*

BAXTER Yes, yes, to see you, certainly But if I had known you had a library

BELINDA Oh, I am so glad I mentioned it Wasn't it lucky, Mr Devenish ?

BAXTER My work has been greatly handicapped of late by lack of certain books to which I wanted to refer It would be a great help----

BELINDA My dear Mr Baxter, my whole library is at your disposal (*To DEVENISH, as she leads the way to the door, in a confidential whisper*) I'm just going to show him the "Encyclopædia Britannica" You won't mind waiting--Delia will be in directly (*She smiles at him, and he opens the door for them both Then he goes towards the garden door and looks outside*)

DELIA (*from the garden*) Hullo ! we're just coming in
(*He goes back and waits for them*)

TREMAYNE Where's Mrs Tremayne ?

DEVENISH She's gone to the library with Baxter

TREMAYNE (*carelessly*) Oh, the library Where's that ?

DEVENISH (*promptly going towards the door and opening it*) The end door on the right Right at the end You can't mistake it On the right

TREMAYNE Ah, yes (*He looks round at DELIA*) Yes
(*He looks at DEVENISH*) Yes [*He goes out*

(DEVENISH *hastily shuts the door and comes back to*
DELIA)

DEVENISH I say, your mother is a ripper

DELIA (*enthusiastically*) Isn't she ? (*Remembering*) At least, you mean my aunt ?

DEVENISH (*smiling at her*). No, I mean your mother To think that I once had the cheek to propose to her

DELIA: Oh! Is it cheek to propose to people?

DEVENISH: To *her*.

DELIA: But not to me?

DEVENISH: Oh, I say, Delia!

DELIA (*with great dignity*): Thank you, my name is Miss Robinson—I mean, Tremayne.

DEVENISH: Well, if you're not quite sure which it is, it's much safer to call you Delia.

DELIA (*smiling*): Well, perhaps it is.

DEVENISH: And if I did propose to you, you haven't answered yet.

DELIA: If you want an answer now, it's no; but if you like to wait till next April——

DEVENISH (*reproachfully*): Oh, I say, and I cut my hair for you the same afternoon. You haven't really told me how you like it yet.

DELIA: Oh, how bad of me! You look lovely.

DEVENISH: And I promised to give up poetry for your sake.

DELIA: Perhaps I oughtn't to have asked you that.

DEVENISH: As far as I'm concerned, Delia, I'll do it gladly, but, of course, one has to think about posterity.

DELIA: But you needn't be a poet. You could give posterity plenty to think about if you were a statesman.

DEVENISH: I don't quite see your objection to poetry.

DELIA: You would be about the house so much. I want you to go away every day and do great things, and then come home in the evening and tell me all about it.

DEVENISH: Then you *are* thinking of marrying me?

DELIA: Well, I was just thinking in case I had to.

DEVENISH: It would be rather fun if you did. And look here—I *will* be a statesman, if you like, and go up to Downing Street every day, and come back in the evening and tell you all about it.

DELIA: How nice of you!

DEVENISH (*magnificently, holding up a hand to Heaven*): Farewell, Parnassus!

DELIA: What does that mean?

DIVENISH Well, it means that I've chucked poetry A statesman's life is the life for me, behold Mr Devenish, the new M P —no, look here, that was quite accidental

DELIA (*smiling at him*) I believe I shall really like you when I get to know you

DEVENISH I don't know if it's you or Devonshire, or the fact that I've had my hair cut, but I feel quite a different being from what I was three days ago

DELIA You *are* different Perhaps it's your sense of humour coming back

DEVENISH Perhaps that's it It's a curious feeling

DELIA (*holding out her hand*) Let's go outside, there's a heavenly moon

DEVENISH (*taking her hand*) Moon ? Moon ? Now where have I heard that word before ?

DELIA What *do* you mean ?

DEVENISH I was trying not to be a poet Well, I'll come with you, but I shall refuse to look at it (*Putting his left hand behind his back, he walks slowly out with her, saying to himself*) The Prime Minister then left the House

BELINDA and TREMAYNE *come in from the library*

BELINDA (*as he opens the door*) Think you I don't think it's unkind to leave him, do you ? He seemed quite happy

TREMAYNE I shouldn't have been happy if we'd stayed

BELINDA (*going to the sofa and putting her feet up*) Yes, but I was really thinking of Mr Baxter

TREMAYNE Not of me ?

BELINDA Well, I thought it was Mr Baxter's turn Poor man, he's had a disappointment lately

TREMAYNE (*eagerly*) A disappointment ?

BELINDA Yes, he thought I was—younger than I was

TREMAYNE (*smiling to himself*) How old are you, Belinda ?

BELINDA (*dropping her eyes*) Twenty-two (*After a pause*) He thought I was eighteen Such a disappointment !

TREMAYNE (*smiling openly at her*) Belinda, how old are you ?

BELINDA Just about the right age, Mr Robinson

TREMAYNE. The right age for what ?

BELINDA For this sort of conversation

TREMAINE Shall I tell you how ^{old} ~~old~~ you are

BELINDA Do you mean in figures or—~~poetically~~?

TREMAINE I meant—

BELINDA Mr Devenish said ~~I was~~ as old as the—now, I must get this the right way round—as old as the—

TREMAINE I don't want to talk about Mr Devenish

BELINDA (*with a sigh*) Nobody ever does—except Mr Devenish As old as the stars, and as young as the dawn (*Settling herself cosily*) I think that's rather a nice age to be don't you?

TREMAINE A very nice age to be

BELINDA It's a pity he's thrown me over for Delia, I shall miss that sort of thing rather. You don't say those sort of things about your aunt-in-law—not so often

TREMAINE (*eagerly*) He really is in love with Miss Robinson?

BELINDA Oh, yes I expect he is out in the moonlight with her now, comparing her to Diana

TREMAINE Well, that accounts for *him* Now what about Baxter?

BELINDA I thought I told you Deeply disappointed to find that I was four years older than he expected, Mr Baxter hurried from the drawing-room and buried himself in a column of the "Encyclopædia Britannica"

TREMAINE Well, that settles Baxter Are there any more men in the neighbourhood?

BELINDA (*shaking her head*) Isn't it awful? I've only had those two for the last three weeks

(TREMAINE *sits on the back of the sofa and looks down at her*)

TREMAINE Belinda

BELINDA Yes, Henry?

TREMAINE My name is John

BELINDA Well, you never told me I had to guess Everybody thinks they can call me Belinda without giving me the least idea what their own names are. You were saying, John?

TREMAINE My friends call me Jack

BELINDA Jack Robinson That's the man who always

goes away so quickly I hope you're making more of a stay ?

TREMayNE Oh, you maddening, maddening woman !

BELINDA Well, I have to keep the conversation going You do nothing but say " Belinda "

TREMayNE (*taking her hand*) Have you ever loved anybody seriously, Belinda ?

BELINDA I don't ever do anything very seriously The late Mr Tremayne, my first husband—Jack—Isn't it funny, *his* name was Jack—he used to complain about it too sometimes

TREMayNE (*with conviction*) Silly ass !

BELINDA I think you are a little hard on the late Mr. Tremayne

TREMayNE Has he been dead long ?

BELINDA Dead to me

TREMayNE You quarrelled ?

BELINDA Yes It was his fault entirely

TREMayNE I'm sure it was

BELINDA How sweet of you to say that !

TREMayNE Belinda, I want you to marry me and forget about him

BELINDA (*happily to herself*) This is the proposal that those lamb cutlets interrupted this morning

TREMayNE Belinda, I love you—do you understand ?

BELINDA Suppose my first husband turns up suddenly like—like E A ?

TREMayNE Like who ?

BELINDA Well, like anybody

TREMayNE He won't—I know he won't Don't you love me enough to risk it, Belinda ?

BELINDA I haven't really said I love you at all yet

TREMayNE Well, say it now (*BELINDA looks at him, and then down again*) You do ! Well, I'm going to have a kiss, anyway (*He comes round the sofa and kisses her quickly*) There !

BELINDA O-oh ! The late Mr Tremayne never did that

TREMayNE I have already told you that he was a silly ass. (*Sitting down on the sofa*) Belinda——

BELINDA Yes, Henry—I mean, Jack ?

IRIMAYNE Do you know who I am ? (*He is thoroughly enjoying the surprise he is about to give her*)

BELINDA (*nodding*) Yes, Jack

IRIMAYNE Who ?

BELINDA Jack Tremayne

TRIMAYNE (*jumping up*) Good heavens, you *know* !

BELINDA (*gently*) Yes, Jack

IRIMAYNE (*angrily*) You've known all the time that I was your husband, and you've been playing with me and leading me on !

BELINDA (*mildly*) Well, darling, you knew all the time that I was your wife, and you've been making love to me and leading me on

TREMAINE That's different

BELINDA That's *just* what the late Mr Tremayne said, and then he slammed the door and went straight off to the Rocky Mountains and shot bears, and I didn't see him again for eighteen years

TREMAINE (*remorsefully*) Darling, I was a fool then, and I'm a fool now

BELINDA I was a fool then, but I'm not such a fool now. I'm not going to let you go It's quite time I married and settled down

TREMAINE You darling! How did you find out who I was ?

BELINDA (*awkwardly*) Well, it was rather curious, darling (*After a pause*) It was April, and I felt all sort of Aprilly, and—and—there was the garden all full of daffodils—and—and—there was Mr Baxter—the one we left in the library—knowing all about moles He's probably got the M volume down now Well, we were talking about them one day, and I happened to say that the late Mr. Tremayne—that was you, darling—had rather a peculiar one on his arm And then he happened to see it this morning and told me about it

TREMAINE What an extraordinary story !

BELINDA Yes, darling, it's really much more extraordinary than that I think perhaps I'd better tell you the rest of it another time (*Coaxingly*) Now show me where the nasty lion scratched you. (TREMAINE *pulls up his*

sleeve) Oh! (*She kisses his arm*) You shouldn't have left Chelsea, darling

TREMAYNE I should never have found you if I hadn't

BELINDA (*squeezing his arm*) No, Jack, you wouldn't (*after a pause*) I— I've got another little surprise for you if—if you're ready for it (*Standing up*) Properly speaking I ought to be wearing white I shall certainly stand up while I'm telling you (*Modestly*) Darling, we have a daughter—our little Delia

TREMAYNE Delia? You said her name was Robinson

BELINDA Yes, darling, but you said yours was One always takes one's father's name Unless, of course, you were Lord Robinson

TREMAYNE But you said her name was Robinson before you—oh, never mind about that A daughter! Belinda, how could you let me go and not tell me?

BELINDA You forget how you'd slammed the door It isn't the sort of thing you shout through the window to a man on his way to America

TREMAYNE (*taking her in his arms*) Oh, Belinda, don't let me ever go away again

BELINDA I'm not going to, Jack I'm going to settle down into a staid old married woman

TREMAYNE Oh no, you're not You're going on just as you did before And I'm going to propose to you every April, and win you, over all the other men in love with you

BELINDA You darling!

DELIA and DEVENISH *come in from the garden*

TREMAYNE (*quietly to BELINDA*) Our daughter

DELIA (*going up to TREMAYNE*) You're my father

TREMAYNE If you don't mind very much, Delia

DELIA You've been away a long time

TREMAYNE I'll do my best to make up for it

BELINDA Delia, darling I think you might kiss your poor old father

(*As she does so, DEVENISH suddenly and hastily kisses BELINDA on the cheek*)

DEVENISH Just in case you're going to be my mother-in-law.

TREMAYNE We seem to be rather a family party

BELINDA (*suddenly*) There ' We've forgotten Mr Baxter again

BAXTER (*who has come in quietly with a book in his hand*) Oh, don't mind about me, Mrs Tremayne I've enjoyed myself immensely (*Referring to his book*) I have been collecting some most valuable information on (*looking up at them*) lunacy in the—er—county of Devonshire

THE DOVER ROAD
A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

IMPORTANT

*No performance of this play may be given
unless written permission has been obtained
from*

Messrs Samuel French, Ltd,
26 Southampton Street, Strand,
London, W C 2

PEOPLE IN THE PLAY

THE HOUSE

DOMINIC
THE STAFF
MR LATIMER

THE GUESTS

LEONARD
ANNE
EUSTASIA
NICHOLAS

*The Scene is the reception-room of MR LATIMER'S house,
a little way off the Dover Road*

THE first performance of this play in London took place at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, on June 7, 1922, with the following cast

Dominic
Mr Latimer
Leonard
Anne
Eustasia
Nicholas

ALLAN AYNESWORTH
HENRY AINLEY
NICHOLAS HANNEN
NANCY ATKIN
ATHENE SEYLER
JOHN DEVERELL

THE DOVER ROAD

ACT I

What MR LATIMER prefers to call the reception-room of his house is really the hall. You come straight into it through the heavy oak front door. But this door is so well built, so well protected by a thick purple curtain, and the room so well warmed by central heating, that none of the usual disadvantages of a hall on a November night attaches to it. Just now, of course, all the curtains are drawn, so that the whole of this side of the hall is purple-hung. In the middle of the room, a little to the right, is a mahogany table, clothless, laid for three. A beautiful blue bowl, filled with purple anemones, helps, with the silver and the old cut glass, to decorate it. Over the whole room there is something of an Arabian-night-adventure air. In the daytime, perhaps, it is an ordinary hall, furnished a trifle freakishly, but in the night time one wonders what is going to happen next.

DOMINIC, tall, stout, and grave, the major-domo of the house, in a butler's old-fashioned evening dress, comes in. He stands looking at the room to see that all is as it should be, then walks to the table and gives a little touch to it here and there. He turns round and waits a moment. The Staff materialises suddenly—two footmen and two chambermaids. The men come from the left, the women from the right, over their clothes, too, MR LATIMER has been a little freakish. They stand in a line.

DOMINIC The blue room in the east wing is ready?

THE MEN Yes, Mr Dominic

DOMINIC The white room in the west wing is ready.

THE WOMAN Yes, Mr Dominic.

DOMINIC The procedure will be as before.

THE FOUR Yes, Mr Dominic.

DOMINIC See to it that I have no fault to find. That will do.

(They go out. He looks at his watch and then follows the men. He is hardly out of the room when a bell rings. He returns slowly, draws the curtain from the front door, and opens it. LEONARD, in fur-coat and cap, is seen standing outside. He is a big, well-made man of about thirty-five—dark, with a little black tooth-brush moustache. When the door opens he gets his first sight of the interior of the room, and is evidently taken by surprise.)

LEONARD Oh—er—is this—er—an hotel? My chauffeur said—we've had an accident, been delayed on the way—he said that we could put up here. *(He turns round and calls)* Here, Saunders! This can't be the place. *(To DOMINIC)* Perhaps you could tell me—

ANNE *(from outside, invisible)* Saunders has gone, Leonard.

LEONARD *(turning round)* Gone! What the devil—*(He plunges into the darkness.)*

DOMINIC Saunders was perfectly correct, my lord. This is a sort of hotel.

ANNE *(getting out of the car, but still invisible)* He went off as soon as you got out of the car. Leonard, are you sure—?

(She comes into the light, he is holding her arm. Pretty she is, to the first sight, but what holds you is the mystery of her youthfulness, her aloof, untouched innocence, her grave coolness, her—well, we shall let her speak for herself. Just at present she is a little upset by the happenings of the night.)

DOMINIC Saunders was perfectly correct, my lord. This is a sort of hotel.

LEONARD *(puzzled)* What the devil's happened to him *(He looks out into the darkness.)*

DOMINIC Doubtless he has gone round to the garage to get the doors open Won't your lordship——

LEONARD You can put us up? Just for to-night My—er—wife and myself——

DOMINIC If your lordship and her ladyship will come in—— (*He waits for them*)

LEONARD (*to ANNE*) It's the best we can do, dear I'm frightfully sorry about it, but, after all, what difference——

ANNE (*giving him a look which means "Don't talk like this in front of hotel servants"*) I daresay it will be quite comfortable It's only for one night (*She comes in, followed by LEONARD*)

DOMINIC Thank you, my lady

(*He shuts and bolts the doors, then draws the curtains There is an air of finality about it ANNE looks back at the noise of the bolts going home with something of a start They are locked in now for good LEONARD, his eye on the supper-table, is saying to himself, "Dashed rummy sort of hotel"*)

DOMINIC Allow me, my lady (*He helps them off with their coats*)

LEONARD You can give us something to eat?

ANNE I don't want anything, Leonard,

LEONARD Nonsense, dear

DOMINIC Supper will be served in five minutes, my lord

ANNE (*suddenly*) Do you know who we are?

DOMINIC I have not that pleasure, my lady

ANNE Then why do you call me "my lady"?

LEONARD (*disliking a scene*) My dear!

ANNE (*waving back LEONARD's protesting arm*) No, Leonard (*To DOMINIC*) Well?

DOMINIC His lordship mentioned that your ladyship was his wife

ANNE Y—yes. Then you know *him* by sight?

LEONARD (*complacently*) Well, my dear, that need not surprise you

DOMINIC I know his lordship's^e rank, my lady Not his lordship's name

LEONARD (*surprised*) My rank? How the devil——

DOMINIC Supper will be served in five minutes, my lady
(*He bows and goes out*)

(*There is silence for a little. They look at the table,
at the room at each other. Then LEONARD
says it aloud*)

LEONARD Dashed tummy sort of hotel !

ANNE (*coming closer and holding his arm*) Leonard I
don't like it

LEONARD Pooh ! Nonsense, dear

ANNE It almost seems as though they had expected
us

LEONARD (*laughing*) My dear child, how could they ?
In the ordinary way we should have been at Dover—why,
almost at Calais by this time

ANNE I know (*In distress*) Why aren't we ?

LEONARD The car—Saunders, a fool of a chauffeur—a
series of unfortunate accidents——

ANNE Do you often have these unfortunate accidents,
Leonard ?

LEONARD My dear Anne, you aren't suggesting that I've
done this on purpose !

ANNE No, no (*She leaves him, and goes and sits down*),
But why to-night of all nights ?

LEONARD Of course, it's damned annoying missing the
boat, but we can get it to-morrow morning. We shall be in
Paris to-morrow night

ANNE To-morrow night—but that makes such a
difference. I hate every hour we spend together like this in
England

LEONARD Well, really, I don't see why——

ANNE You must take it that I do, Leonard. I told you
from the first that it was run-away or nothing with me ;
there was going to be no intrigue, no lies and pretences and
evasions. And somehow it seems less—less sordid, if we
begin our new life together in a new country (*With a little
smile*) Perhaps the French for what we are doing is not
quite so crude as the English. Yes, I know it's absurd
of me, but there it is

LEONARD (*with a shrug*) Oh, well ! (*Taking out his case*)
Do you mind a cigarette ?

ANNE (*violently*) Oh, why do men always want to

smoke, even up to the moment when they're going to eat ' Can't you breathe naturally for five minutes ?

LEONARD (*sulkily, putting his case back*) I beg your pardon

ANNE No, I beg yours

LEONARD You're all to bits

ANNE Nerves, I suppose

LEONARD Nonsense ! My Anne with nerves ? (*Bitterly*) Now if it had been Eustasia——

ANNE (*coldly*) Really, Leonard I think we had better leave your wife out of the conversation

LEONARD I beg your pardon

ANNE (*to herself*) Perhaps you're right In a crisis we are all alike, we women

LEONARD (*going over to her*) No, damn it, I won't have that It's—it's blasphemy Anne, my darling—(*She stands up and he takes her hands*)

ANNE Oh ! I am different, aren't I ?

LEONARD Darling !

ANNE I'm not a bit like—like anybody else, am I, not even when I'm cross ?

LEONARD Darling !

ANNE And you do love me ?

LEONARD Darling ! (*He wants to kiss her, but she stops him*)

ANNE No Now you're going to smoke (*She settles him in his chair, takes a cigarette from his case, and puts it in his mouth*) I'll light it for you Matches ? (*She holds out her hand for them*)

DOMINIC (*who has a way of being there when wanted*) Matches, my lady (*He hands them to her They are both rather confused*)

ANNE Thank you

LEONARD (*annoyed*) Thanks (*He gets up, takes the matches from ANNE, and lights his cigarette DOMINIC gives a professional touch to the table and goes out*) Damn that fellow !

ANNE (*smiling*) After all, darling, he thinks I'm your wife Or don't wives light their husband's cigarettes ?

LEONARD I believe you're right, Anne There's something odd about this place

ANNE So *you* feel it now ?

LEONARD What did he mean by saying he knew my rank, but not my name ?

ANNE (*lightly*) Perhaps he looked inside your cap—like Sherlock Holmes—and saw the embroidered coronet

LEONARD How do you mean ? There's nothing inside my cap

ANNE No, darling That was a joke (*He nods tolerantly*)

LEONARD And the table laid Only one table

ANNE Yes, but it's for three They didn't expect us

LEONARD (*relieved*) So it is It's probably a new idea in hotels—some new stunt of Harrods—or what's the fellow's name ?—Lyons A country-house hotel By the way, what will you drink ?

DOMINIC (*there as usual*) Bollinger 1906, my lord (*He has startled them again*) Mr Latimer will be down in two minutes, my lady He asks you to forgive him for not being here to receive you

LEONARD Mr Latimer ? Who on earth's Mr Latimer ?

DOMINIC If you would wish to be shown your room, my lady—

ANNE (*who has not taken her eyes off him*) No, thank you

LEONARD (*stepping forward*) Look here, my man, is this an hotel or have we come to a private house by mistake ?

DOMINIC A sort of hotel, my lord I assure your lordship there is no mistake Thank you, my lady

[*He goes out*]

ANNE (*laughing half-hysterically as she sits down*) Very original man, Harrod Or is it Lyons ?

LEONARD Look here, I'm going to get to the bottom of this (*He starts after DOMINIC*)

ANNE Why bother ? Mr Latimer will be here in two minutes

LEONARD (*turning back*) Yes, but who the devil's Mr Latimer ?

ANNE (*with interest*) Leonard, do you always arrange something fascinating like this when you elope ? I think it's so romantic of you But don't you think that the mere running away is enough just at first ? Leaving the fogs and

the frets of England, the weariness and the coldness of it, and escaping together to the warm, blue, sun-filled South— isn't that romantic enough? Why drag in a mysterious, and impossible inn, a mysterious and impossible Mr Latimer? You should have kept them for afterwards, for the time when the poetry was wearing out, and we were beginning to get used to each other

LEONARD My dear girl, what *are* you driving at? I say again—do you really think that I *arranged* all this?

ANNE Well, somebody did

(The two Footmen and the two Chambermaids come in and take up positions on each side of the table. They are followed by DOMINIC.)

DOMINIC Mr Latimer!

(MR LATIMER comes in, looks at the visitors, goes off absent-mindedly with DOMINIC and his Staff, and then comes apologetically back again.)

LATIMER Good evening!

(He bows with an air, an airy gentleman, neither young nor old, dressed rather fantastically as regards his tie and his dinner-jacket and the flower in his button-hole, and enjoying impishly every word of it.)

LEONARD Good evening Er——

LATIMER *(confidentially)*. You will forgive me for being announced in my own house, but I find that it saves so much trouble. If I had just come in and said, "I am Mr Latimer," then *you* would have had to say, "And I am—er—So-and-so, and this is—er——" Exactly I mean we can get on so much better without names. But of course——

LEONARD You will excuse me, sir, but——

LATIMER *(going happily on)*. But of course, as you were just going to say, we must call each other *something*. *(Thoughtfully)* I think I shall call you Leonard. There is something about you—forgive the liberty—something Leonardish. *(With a very sweet smile to ANNE)* I am sure you agree with me.

ANNE I am wondering whether this is really happening, or whether I am dreaming it

LATIMER *(his back to LEONARD)*. And Leonard isn't

wondering at all, he is just tapping his forehead with a great deal of expression

(LEONARD, *who was doing this, stops in some confusion*)

LEONARD (*coldly*) I think we have had enough of this, Mr Latimer! I was giving you the benefit of the doubt. If you are not mad, then I will ask you for some other explanation of all this nonsense

LATIMER (*sniffing at the flower in his button-hole*) An impetuous character, Leonard. It must be so obvious to everybody else in the room that an explanation will be forthcoming. But why not a friendly explanation following a friendly supper?

ANNE Are we your guests?

LATIMER Please.

ANNE Thank you

LATIMER But there is still this question of names. Now we agreed about Leonard——

ANNE (*looking at him fearlessly*) My name is Anne

LATIMER Thank you, Miss Anne

LEONARD (*awkwardly*) Er—my wife

LATIMER Then I am tempted to leave out the “Miss”

LEONARD (*annoyed again*) Look here——

LATIMER (*turning to him*) But there is nothing to look at if I do, Leonard. (*The Staff comes in*) Ah, supper! Will you sit here, Anne? (*He goes to the head of the table and indicates the chair on the right of him*) And you here, Leonard? (*The chair on the left.*) That's right. (*They all sit down*)

(DOMINIC and the Staff serve the supper. Five of them, so things go quickly.)

LATIMER “A little fish, a bird, a little sweet. Enough to drink, but not too much to eat.” I composed that in my bath this morning. The wine has been waiting for you since 1906. How different from the turbot! 'Twas but yesterday it scarce had heard the name of Le-o-nard. (*They are all served with fish, and the wine has been poured out*) Dominic, dismiss the Staff. We would be alone. (*They are alone. He rises, glass in hand*) My friends, I will give you a toast. (*He raises his glass*) A Happy Ending!

ANNE (*lifting her glass*) A Happy Ending!

LATIMER You don't drink, Leonard You would have the adventure end unhappily, as is the way of the modern novel '

LEONARD I don't understand the beginning of it, Mr Latimer I don't—you will forgive me for saying so—I don't see how *you* came into it Who *are* you ?

ANNE Our host, Leonard

LEONARD So it seems, my dear But in that case, how did we come here ? My chauffeur told us that this was an hotel—your man assured me, when I asked, that it was an hotel, a sort of hotel And now it seems that we are in a private house Moreover, we seem to have been expected And then again—if you will forgive me—it appears to be an unusual kind of house I tell you frankly that I don't understand it

LATIMER I see your difficulty, Leonard

LEONARD (*stiffly*) Nor am I accustomed to being called Leonard by a perfect stranger

LATIMER What you are saying for yourself is, "Who is this man Latimer ? Is he *known* ? Is he in the Stud Book ?—I mean Debrett Is he perhaps one of the Hammersmith Latimers, or does he belong to the Ealing Branch ? "

ANNE (*calmly eating*) What does it matter ?

LATIMER Yes, but then *you* like the fish Leonard doesn't

LEONARD I have no fault to find with the fish You have an excellent cook

LATIMER (*gravely bowing*) I beg your pardon, I thank you (DOMINIC *comes in*) His lordship likes the fish.

DOMINIC Thank you, sir I will inform the cook

[*He goes out*]

ANNE When you are giving us your tiresome explanations after supper, Mr Latimer, I wish you would just add one more to them

LATIMER But of course !

ANNE Your Mr Dominic's appearances are so apt How is it done ?

LATIMER (*pulling down his cuff*) Yes, I'll make a note of that. (*He writes on it*) Dominic—Apt appearance of.

DOMINIC *reappears.*

LATIMER Admit the bird, Dominic

[DOMINIC goes out

LEONARD (*rising stiffly*) I'm afraid we shall have to be getting on now, Mr Latimer Anne, dear We are much obliged for your hospitality, but—er—I imagine we are not far from Dover—

LATIMER On the Dover Road, certainly

LEONARD Exactly So if you would—er—have instructions given to my chauffeur—er— (*He hesitates as the Staff comes in*)

LATIMER Dominic, his lordship's glass is empty He wishes to drink my health

DOMINIC I beg your pardon, my lord (*The glass is filled*)

LATIMER And while he is up, just find his lordship a more comfortable chair He has been a little uneasy on that one all through the fish

DOMINIC I beg your pardon, my lord (*The chair is changed*)

LATIMER (*rising with his glass and drinking to LEONARD*). Your happiness! (*He sits down, and LEONARD mechanically sits down too*) Now for the bird (*To ANNE*) I like these little ceremonies in between the courses Don't you?

ANNE I'm liking my supper

LATIMER I am so glad (*As ANNE is helped*) I shot this bird myself (*He looks at it through his glass*) What is it, Dominic?

DOMINIC *Poulet en casserole* with mushrooms, sir

LATIMER *Poulet en casserole* with mushrooms I shot the mushrooms . . . A large help for his lordship, Dominic (*To LEONARD*) Let me introduce your chicken to you, Leonard One of the Buff-Orpingtons I daresay you know the family His mother was a Wyandotte He was just about to contract an alliance with one of the Rock girls, the Plymouth Rocks, when the accident happened

(*They are alone again now, plates and glasses well filled LEONARD, who has been waiting impatiently for the Staff to go, pushes back his chair and gets up*)

LATIMER Dear me! Not a third chair, surely?

LEONARD Now look here, Mr Latimer, this farce has

gone on long enough I do not propose to sit through a whole meal without some further explanation Either we have that explanation now, or else—Anne, dear—or else, we'll be getting on our way

LATIMER (*thoughtfully*) Ah, but which is your way?

LEONARD Dove! My chauffeur seems to have got off the track a little, but if you can put us on to the Dover Road—

LATIMER (*to himself*) The Dove! Road! The Dover Road! A dangerous road, my friends And you're travelling in the dark.

LEONARD Really, Mr Latimer, that needn't frighten us

ANNE (*putting her hand on his arm*) What do you mean?

LATIMER A strange road, Anne, for *you* A new, untravelled road

LEONARD Nonsense She's often been this way before. Haven't you, dear?

ANNE (*shaking her head*) No But I'm not frightened, Mr Latimer

(*There is silence for a little Then DOMINIC appears noiselessly*)

LATIMER Dominic, supper is over His lordship loved the chicken—too well to eat it He adored the mushrooms—in silence Inform the cook

DOMINIC Yes, sir

LATIMER (*offering his case to ANNE*) A cigarette?

ANNE No, thank you.

LATIMER You permit it?

ANNE Of course

LATIMER Thank you

DOMINIC (*to LEONARD*) Cigar, my lord?

LEONARD Er—er—(*but they are good ones*)—thanks.

LATIMER Well, shall we—?

(*They get up, and move into more comfortable chairs,*

LATIMER *talking*)

LATIMER Which chair would you like, Anne? There? (*She sits down*) That's right Now then, Leonard, we want something especially comfortable for you You are a little finicky about chairs, if you don't mind my saying so

What about *that* one? Just try it and see how you like it (LEONARD *tries it, and sinks into it up to the neck*) Yes,

I think you will be happy there And I shall sit here
Now everything is ready (*They are alone again*)

LEONARD (*with as much dignity as is possible from that sort of chair*) I am waiting, Mr Latimer

LATIMER I am waiting, Leonard, for your questions

ANNE Let me begin with one (*He turns to her*) Your table was laid for three For whom were the other two places intended?

LATIMER For yourself and Leonard

ANNE You expected us?

LATIMER Yes

ANNE How did you know we were coming?

LATIMER Saunders had his instructions to bring you

LEONARD (*starting up from his chair—or trying to*)
Saunders! My chauffeur! Do you mean to say—

LATIMER Let me help you up, Leonard. You have the wrong chair again It is difficult to be properly indignant in that one. (*He helps him into a sitting position*) That's better You were saying—

LEONARD You mean to tell me that you had the audacity to bribe my chauffeur?

LATIMER No, no, Leonard What I mean is that *you* had the foolhardiness to bribe my friend Saunders to be your chauffeur

LEONARD Upon my word—

ANNE Who is Saunders?

LATIMER Saunders? He's Joseph's brother Joseph was the gentleman in orange He helped you to fish

LEONARD (*out of the chair at last*) How dare you interfere in my concerns in this way, sir?

ANNE Before you explain how you dare, Mr Latimer, I should like to know *why* you are so interested in us Who are you?

LATIMER No more than Mr Latimer It is a purely impersonal interest which I take—and I take it just because you are going the Dover Road, my dear, and it is a dangerous road for a young girl to travel

ANNE (*very cool, very proud*). I don't think I asked you to be interested in me

LATIMER Nobody does, my dear But I am Very interested. In all my fellow-travellers It is my hobby

LEONARD Anne ! *(He means, ' Let's get out of this He makes a movement to the front door)*

LATIMER The door is locked, Leonard

LEONARD *(bending over him and putting his face very close to LATIMER'S)* Ah ! Then I will give you one minute in which to open it

DOMINIC *has come in*

LATIMER Dominic, his lordship's face is just a little too close to mine Could you—thank you ! *(LEONARD has started back on noticing DOMINIC)* Coffee ? Excellent *(The Footmen are there with coffee)*

ANNE No, thank you

LEONARD No, thanks *(He sits on another chair)*

LATIMER No, thank you By the way, Dominic, did you go round to the Hospital this afternoon ?

DOMINIC Yes, sir The young gentleman is getting on nicely He was able to take a little bread-and-milk this morning

LATIMER Ah, I'm glad Nothing solid yet ?

DOMINIC No, sir The jaw is still very tender

[He goes out.]

LATIMER *(to LEONARD)* He bumped it against my knuckles last week An impetuous young fellow He was running away with—dear me, I forget her name—I always forget names I think he called her Pussy She had several children *(Unconsciously he has shot his cuff, and sees suddenly the note he has made)* What's this ? “ Dominic—Apt appearance of ” Ah, yes *(He turns to ANNE)* It's very simple A little fad of mine There are bells everywhere in this room—in every chair, on the table, in the floor, wherever I am, I can press a bell for Dominic He is always close at hand on reception-evenings Yes

ANNE That was a little warning which you were giving us just now ?

LATIMER *(apologetically)* Yes I thought it better Leonard is so impetuous Joseph and Jacob were both amateur champions in their day Dominic is a very heavy fall-er He never has to fall on a man twice If all this is quite understood at the beginning, it makes it so much easier

ANNE *(getting up)* Mr Latimer, I assure you that this is

not a sudden freak of fancy, and that I know my own mind I ask you, as a gentleman, to open the door

LATIMER (*shaking his head*) I am afraid it is impossible, Anne (*She shrugs her shoulders and sits down*)

LEONARD (*calm for the moment*) So we are kept here by force?

LATIMER Need we insist upon it? Let us rather say that you have postponed your visit to France in order to spend a few days with a friend

LEONARD I prefer to say force

LATIMER (*with a bow*) I do not dictate your words to you Your movements for the moment, yes So let us say force

LEONARD We are prisoners, in fact?

LATIMER Within the limits of my house

LEONARD And if my—my wife chooses to walk out of your front door to-morrow morning, your—your fellow-conspirators would lay hands on her and stop her?

LATIMER My dear Leonard, why should your—your wife want to walk out of the front door to-morrow? What would she want to do in the garden in November? Do be reasonable

LEONARD Suppose she wished to walk to the nearest police-station?

LATIMER (*to ANNE*) Do you?

ANNE (*with a smile*) Could I?

LATIMER If you stood on Leonard's shoulders you might just reach the top of the wall Dominic tells me that they have lost the key of the gates Very careless of them

LEONARD Well, I'm—— It's monstrous!

ANNE Yes, but we can't keep on saying that Here we are apparently, and here we have to stay But I still want to know very much *why* Mr Latimer has this great desire for our company

LEONARD You have the advantage of me now, sir, but you will not always have it The time will come when I shall demand satisfaction for this insult

LATIMER (*with an au—rising and bowing*) My lord! Letters addressed to me at the Charing Cross Post Office will always be forwarded!

LEONARD (*slightly upset*) This gross insult to myself and
to my wife

LATIMER No no, not your wife

LEONARD How dare you !

LATIMER (*in alarm*) Surely I haven't made a mistake
(*To ANNE*) You and he are running away together, aren't
you ?

LEONARD (*a step nearer*) Look here, sir——

ANNE Oh, Leonard, what's the good ? We aren't
ashamed of it are we ? Yes, Mr Latimer, we are running
away together

LATIMER Of course ! Why not ? Leonard, *you* aren't
ashamed of it, are you ?

LEONARD I object to this interference in my private
affairs by a——

LATIMER Yes, yes, but you've said all that It's inter-
fering of me, damnably interfering But I am doing it
because I want you both to be happy

LEONARD I can look after my own happiness

LATIMER *And this lady's ?*

LEONARD She is good enough to believe it

ANNE I am not a child Do you think I haven't thought ?
The scandal, the good name I am going to lose, the position
of that other woman, I have thought of all these things

LATIMER There is one thing of which you haven't thought,
Anne

ANNE (*how young she is*) I am afraid you are old-
fashioned You are going to talk to me of morality

LATIMER (*smiling*) Oh, no, I wasn't

ANNE (*not heeding him*) Living alone here, a bachelor,
within these high walls which keep the world out, you
believe what the fairy-books tell us, that once two people
are married they live happy ever after

LATIMER Oh, no, I don't

ANNE I am the wicked woman, coming between the
happy husband and wife, breaking up the happy home
Is that it, Mr Latimer ?

LEONARD Rubbish ! The happy home ! Why, this is
my first real chance of happiness

LATIMER His first real chance of happiness ! As he said
when he proposed to Eustasia.

LEONARD (*upset*) What's that ?

LATIMER (*to ANNE*) May I ask *you* some questions now ?

ANNE Yes

LATIMER Eustasia will divorce him '

LEONARD We shall not defend the suit

LATIMER And then you will marry Anne ?

LEONARD Another insult I shall not forget it

LATIMER I beg your pardon I simply wanted an answer

ANNE He will marry me

LATIMER I see And then, as the fairy-books tell us, you will live happy ever after ' (*ANNE is silent*)

LEONARD I need hardly say that I shall do my best to——

LATIMER (*to ANNE*) And then, as the fairy-books tell us, you will live happy ever after ? (*ANNE is silent*) I live within my high walls which keep the world out, I am old-fashioned, Anne You are modern, you know the world You don't believe the fairy-books, and yet—you are going to live happy ever after ?

LEONARD I don't see what you're driving at

LATIMER Anne does

ANNE (*raising her eyes to him*) I take the risk, Mr Latimer

LATIMER But a big risk Oh, believe me, I am not so much out of the world as you think Should I have known all about you, should I have brought you here, if I were ? I know the world, I know the risks of marriage Marriage is an art—well, it's a profession in itself (*Sharply*) And what are you doing ? Marrying a man whose only qualification for the profession is that he has tried it once, and made a damned hash of it

LEONARD Well, really, sir '

LATIMER Isn't it true ?

LEONARD Well—er—I admit my marriage has not been a happy one, but I venture to say—well, I don't wish to say anything against Eustasia——

LATIMER Go on Life is too short for us to be gentlemen all the time

LEONARD (*explosively*) Well, then, I say that not even St Michael and all his angels could have made a success of it. I mean, not even St Michael

LATIMER Yet you chose her.

LEONARD Er—well—— (*But he has nothing to say*)

LATIMER (*after a pause*) Miss Anne, I am not being moral. You see, I am a very rich man, and we know on good authority that it is difficult for a very rich man to be a very good man. But being a very rich man I try to spend my money so that it makes somebody else happy besides myself. It's the only happy way of spending money, isn't it? And it's my hobby to prevent people—to try if I can prevent people—making unhappy marriages. It's wonderful what power money gives you. Nobody realises it, because nobody ever spends it save in the obvious ways. You may say that I should have prevented Leonard from marrying Eustasia in the first place. I have done that sometimes. I have asked two young people here—oh, properly chaperoned—and guests, not prisoners as you are—two young people who thought that they were in love, and I have tried to show each to the other in the most unromantic light. Sometimes the engagement has been broken off. Sometimes they have married and—lived happy ever after. But mostly it is my hobby to concentrate on those second marriages into which people plunge—with no parents now to restrain them—so much more hastily even than they plunge into their first adventure. Yet how much more carefully they should be considered, seeing that one at least of the parties has already proved his utter ignorance of the art of marriage. And so, my dear friends, when I hear—and a rich man has many means of hearing—when I hear that two people are taking the Dover Road, as you were taking it to-night, I venture to stop them, and say, in the words of the fairy-book, “Are you *sure* you are going to live happy ever after?”

LEONARD. Your intentions may be good, but I can only repeat that your interference is utterly unwarranted, and you are entirely mistaken as to the power and authority which your money gives you.

LATIMER Authority, none. But power? (*He laughs*) Why, my dear Leonard, if I offered you a hundred thousand pounds to go back to your wife to-night, this lady would never see you again.

LEONARD Well, of all the damnable things to say——

LATIMER How damnable the truth is ! Think it over to-night, Leonard You are a poor man for your position—think of all the things you could do with a hundred thousand pounds Turn it over in your mind—and then over and over again A hundred thousand pounds

(For a moment it seems as if LEONARD is beginning to turn it, but ANNE interrupts)

ANNE *(scornfully)* Is this part of the treatment ? Am I being shown my lover when he is mercenary ?

LATIMER *(with a laugh)* Oh no ! If that were part of my treatment, there would be no marriages at all Oh no, it isn't a genuine offer *(To LEONARD)* It's off, Leonard You needn't think it out any more *(LEONARD wakes up suddenly, a poor man)* Besides, you misunderstand me I don't want to separate you by force—I have no right to

ANNE But how modest suddenly !

LATIMER *(with a bow and a smile)* Madam, I admire your spirit

ANNE Leonard, I am receiving the attentions of another man Beware of jealousy All part of the treatment, Mr Latimer ?

LATIMER You're splendid *(Seriously)* But I meant what I said just now I am not preventing you from going the Dover Road, I am only asking you to wait a few days and see how you get on It may be that you two are the perfect soul-mates, that your union has already been decreed in Heaven and will be watched over by the angels If so, nobody will rejoice in your happiness more than I I shall not say, " You have no right to be happy together Leonard must remain with his lawfully-wedded Eustasia " Believe me, I do not waste my money, my time, my breath in upholding the sanctity of an unhappy marriage I was brought up in the sanctity of an unhappy marriage, even as a child I knew all about it *(Less seriously)* But oh, my dear Anne, let us have a little common sense before we adventure marriage with a man who is always making a mess of it We know what Leonard is—how perfectly hopeless as a husband

ANNE I don't think that is quite fair

LATIMER Well, as far as we can tell You've never made a happy marriage yet, have you, Leonard ?

LEONARD (*sulkily*) I don't want to say anything against Eustasia —

LATIMER Good God, man, aren't you shouting it all the time? Why else are you here? But don't try to pretend that it's all Eustasia's fault

LEONARD (*doubtfully*) Well——

LATIMER Or that it will be all Anne's fault *next year*

LEONARD What do you mean, next year?

LATIMER I beg your pardon I should have said the year after next (*There is a little silence*)

ANNE (*getting up*) I think I will go to bed How long do you want us to wait?

LATIMER Can you spare a week? You with so many years in front of you

ANNE (*deciding that the moment has come to put MR LATIMER in his place*) I have a father I left him a note to say what I was doing We don't see much of each other, but I thought it polite (*Triumphantly*) Does *that* interfere with your plans at all?

LATIMER (*smiling*) Not at all There was a little mistake about the delivery of that note Your father is under the impression that you are staying with friends—in Kent A great power, money

ANNE (*deciding, with dignity, that the moment has not come*) I congratulate you on the perfection of your methods Good-night

(DOMINIC is in the room)

LATIMER Her ladyship will retire

DOMINIC Yes, sir

[*He goes out*]

LATIMER Good night, Miss Anne

ANNE (*holding out her hand suddenly*) Without prejudice

LATIMER (*bending over it gallantly*) Ah, but you are prejudicing me entirely

A MAID comes in

MAID This way, my lady

(*She leads the way to a door on the right, and ANNE follows her*)

LATIMER (*pleasantly, to LEONARD*) And did you leave a note for your father, Leonard?

LEONARD You ought to know You appear to have

your conspirators everywhere Saunders—and, I suppose, Anne's maid—and God knows who else

LATIMER Money, Leonard, money A pity you refused that hundred thousand pounds You could have bribed the Archbishop of Canterbury to curse me Well, a week here won't do either of you any harm Have a whisky and soda ?

LEONARD I am not at all sure that I ought to drink in your house

LATIMER You will be thirsty before you go

LEONARD (*hesitating*) Well—

(*A Footman appears with the whisky*)

LATIMER That's right Help yourself, won't you ?

LEONARD (*helping himself*) Please understand that I do this, as I do everything else in your house, under protest

LATIMER (*shooting his cuff and taking out his pencil*) Your protest is noted

LEONARD (*returning to the too comfortable chair*) As I have already said, your conduct is perfectly outrageous (*He sinks into its depths*)

LATIMER And as I have already said, you can't do moral indignation from that chair Remember what happened to you last time

LEONARD Perfectly outrageous (*He drinks*)

LATIMER Have another cigar ?

LEONARD I shall go to bed as soon as I have drunk this (*He drinks*)

LATIMER You wouldn't care for a game of billiards first ?

LEONARD I am not in the mood for billiards

LATIMER By the way, we have another runaway couple here But their week of probation is just over They expect to leave to-morrow

LEONARD I am not interested in your earlier crimes

LATIMER I think you would be interested in *this* couple, Leonard

LEONARD I assure you I am not,

LATIMER Ah ! (*Picking up a review and settling himself*) Very good article this month by Sidney Webb You ought to read it

LEONARD I am not interested in Sidney Webb

LATIMER Breakfast is at ten o'clock. In here

LEONARD (*struggling out of his chair*) I shall eat it under protest

LATIMER You're off? Then I'll say good night

(DOMINIC and the two Footmen, JOSEPH and JACOB, have come in)

LEONARD (*stiffly*) Good night

(*He walks up to the door on the right JACOB is in front of it LEONARD is pulled up at sight of him DOMINIC indicates the door on the left*)

DOMINIC This way, my lord

LEONARD Er—er—thank you

(*He goes out, followed by JOSEPH is alone with Sidney Webb*)

MR LATIMER

ACT II

It is next morning, EUSTASIA, LEONARD'S wife (who should be sitting patiently at home wondering when he will return), is having breakfast with a harmless young man called NICHOLAS. She is what people who talk like that call a "nice little thing," near enough to thirty-five to begin to wish it were twenty-five. At present she is making a good deal of fuss over this dear boy NICHOLAS. Breakfast is practically over. NICHOLAS, in fact, is wiping his mouth

EUSTASIA Finished, darling ?

NICHOLAS Yes, thank you, Eustasia

EUSTASIA A little more toast ?

NICHOLAS No, thank you, Eustasia

EUSTASIA Just a little tiny teeny-weeny bit, if his Eustasia butters it for him ?

NICHOLAS No, thank you I've really finished

EUSTASIA Another cup of coffee ?

NICHOLAS (*with a sigh*) No, thank you, Eustasia

EUSTASIA Just a little bit of a cup if his Eustasia pours it out for her own Nicholas, and puts the sugar in with her own ickle fingers ?

NICHOLAS No more coffee, thank you

EUSTASIA Then he shall sit in a more comfy chair while he smokes his nasty, horrid pipe, which he loves so much better than his Eustasia (*He gets up without saying anything*) He doesn't really love it better ?

NICHOLAS (*laughing uneasily*) Of course he doesn't

EUSTASIA Kiss her to show that he doesn't

NICHOLAS (*doing it gingerly*) You baby !

EUSTASIA And now give me your pipe (*He gives it to her reluctantly. She kisses it and gives it back to him*) There! And she doesn't really think it's a nasty, horrid pipe, and she's ever so sorry she said so Oh! (*She sees a dish of apples suddenly*)

NICHOLAS What is it?

EUSTASIA Nicholas never had an apple!

NICHOLAS Oh no, thanks, I don't want one

EUSTASIA Oh, but he must have an apple! It's so good for him. An apple a day keeps the doctor away. You must keep the doctor away, darling, else poor Eustasia will be miserable

NICHOLAS (*with an effort*) I've finished my breakfast

EUSTASIA Not even if his Eustasia peels it for him?

NICHOLAS No, thank you. I assure you that I have had all I want

EUSTASIA Sure?

NICHOLAS Quite sure, thank you. Where are you going to sit?

EUSTASIA (*indicating the sofa*) Nicholas sit there and Eustasia sit next to him

NICHOLAS (*without much enthusiasm*) Right (*They sit down*)

EUSTASIA Shall Eustasia fill his pipe for him? (*She takes it*)

NICHOLAS (*taking it back*) No, thank you. It is filled (*They are silent for a little, and at last he speaks uncomfortably*) Er—Eustasia

EUSTASIA Yes, darling

NICHOLAS We've been here a week

EUSTASIA Yes, darling. A wonderful, wonderful week. And now to-day we leave this dear house where we have been so happy together, and go out into the world together—

NICHOLAS (*who has not been listening to her*) A week. Except for the first day, we have had all our meals alone together.

EUSTASIA (*sentimentally*) Alone, Nicholas

NICHOLAS Four meals a day—that's twenty-four meals

EUSTASIA Twenty-four!

NICHOLAS And at every one of those meals you have

asked me at least four times to have something more, when I had already said that I didn't want anything more, or, in other words, you have forced me to say "No, thank you, Eustasia," ninety-six times when there was absolutely no need for it

EUSTASIA (*hurt*) Nicholas!

NICHOLAS (*inexorably*) We are both young I am twenty-six, you are——

EUSTASIA (*hopefully*) Twenty-five

NICHOLAS (*looking at her quickly and then away again*) You are twenty-five. If all goes well, we may look to have fifty years more together Say two thousand five hundred weeks Multiply that by a hundred, and we see that in the course of our joint lives you will, at the present rate, force me to say, "No, thank you, Eustasia," two hundred and fifty thousand times more than is necessary (*He relights his pipe*)

EUSTASIA (*pathetically*) Nicholas! (*She applies her handkerchief*)

NICHOLAS I wondered if we couldn't come to some arrangement about it That's all

EUSTASIA You're cruel! Cruel! (*She sobs piteously*)

NICHOLAS (*doggedly*) I just wondered if we couldn't come to some arrangement

EUSTASIA (*completely overcome*) Oh! Oh! Nicholas! My darling!

(NICHOLAS, *his hands clenched, looks grimly in front of him He winces now and then at her sobs He tries desperately hard not to give way, but in the end they are too much for him*)

NICHOLAS (*putting his arms round her*) Darling! Don't! (*She goes on sobbing*) There! There! I'm sorry Nicholas is sorry I oughtn't to have said it Forgive me, darling

EUSTASIA (*between sobs*) It's only because I love you so much, and w-want you to be well And you m-must eat

NICHOLAS Yes, yes, Eustasia, I know. It is dear of you

EUSTASIA. Ask any d-doctor He would say you m-must eat

NICHOLAS Yes, darling

EUSTASIA. You m-must eat

NICHOLAS (*resignedly*) Yes, darling

EUSTASIA (*sitting up and wiping her eyes*) What's a wife for, if it isn't to look after her husband when he's ill, and to see that he eats?

NICHOLAS All right, dear, we won't say anything more about it

EUSTASIA And when you had that horrid cold and were so ill, the first day after we came here, I did look after you didn't I, Nicholas, and take care of you and make you well again?

NICHOLAS You did, dear Don't think I am not grateful You were very kind (*Winning at the recollection*) Too kind

EUSTASIA Not too kind, darling I love looking after you, and doing things for you, and taking care of you, and cossetting you (*Thoughtfully to herself*) Leonard was never ill.

NICHOLAS Leonard?

EUSTASIA My husband

NICHOLAS Oh! I'd never thought of him as Leonard prefer not to think about him I've never seen him, and don't want to talk about him

EUSTASIA No, darling I don't want to either

NICHOLAS We've taken the plunge and—(*bravely*) and we're not going back on it

EUSTASIA (*surprised*) Darling!

NICHOLAS As a man of honour I—— Besides, you can't go back now—I mean I took you away, and—— Well, here we are (*With determination*) Here we are

EUSTASIA Darling, you aren't regretting?

NICHOLAS (*hastily*) No, no! (*She takes out her handkerchief ominously*) No, no, no! (*She begins to sob*) No! No! (*He is almost shouting*) Eustasia, listen! I love you! I'm not regretting! I've never been so happy! (*She is sobbing tumultuously*) So happy, Eustasia! I have never, never been so happy! Can't you hear?

EUSTASIA (*throwing herself into his arms*) Darling!

NICHOLAS There, there!

EUSTASIA (*drying her eyes*) Oh, Nicholas, you frightened me so! Just for a moment I was afraid you were regretting

NICHOLAS No, no!

EUSTASIA How right Mr Latimer was

NICHOLAS (*with conviction*) He was indeed

EUSTASIA How little we really knew of each other when you asked me to come away with you !

NICHOLAS How little !

EUSTASIA But this week has shown us to each other as we really are

NICHOLAS It has.

EUSTASIA And now I feel absolutely safe We are ready to face the world together, Nicholas (*She sighs and leans back happily in his arms*)

NICHOLAS Ready to face the world together

(*He has his pipe in his right hand, which is round her waist Her eyes are closed, her left hand, encircling his neck, holds his left hand He tries to bend his head down so as to get hold of his pipe with his teeth Several times he tries and just misses it Each time he pulls her a little closer to him, and she sighs happily At last he gets hold of it He leans back with a gasp of relief*)

EUSTASIA (*still with her eyes closed*) What is it, darling

NICHOLAS Nothing, Eustasia, nothing Just happiness

(*But they are not to be alone with it for long, for*

MR LATIMER *comes in*)

LATIMER Good morning, my friends, good morning

(*They move apart and NICHOLAS jumps up*)

NICHOLAS Oh, good morning.

EUSTASIA Good morning

LATIMER So you are leaving me this morning and going on your way ?

NICHOLAS (*without enthusiasm*) Yes

EUSTASIA But we shall never forget this week, dear Mr Latimer

LATIMER You have forgiven me for asking you to wait a little so as to make sure ?

EUSTASIA Oh, but you were so right ! I was just saying so to Nicholas Wasn't I, Nicholas ?

NICHOLAS Yes About a minute ago About two minutes ago

LATIMER And so now you are sure of yourselves ?

EUSTASIA Oh, so sure, so very sure Aren't we, Nicholas ?

NICHOLAS Absolutely sure

LATIMER That's right (*Looking at his watch*) Well, I don't want to hurry you, but if you have any little things to do, the car will be here in half an hour, and——

EUSTASIA Half an hour? Oh, I must fly (*She begins*)

NICHOLAS (*not moving*) Yes, we must fly

LATIMER (*going to the door with EUSTASIA*) By the way, you will be interested to hear that I had two other visitors last night

EUSTASIA (*stopping excitedly*) Mr Latimer! You don't mean another—couple?

LATIMER Yes, another romantic couple

EUSTASIA Oh, if I could but see them before we go! Just for a moment! Just to reconcile them to this week of probation! To tell them what a wonderful week it can be!

LATIMER You shall I promise you that you shall

EUSTASIA Oh, thank you, dear Mr Latimer!

(*He goes to the door with her As he comes back*)

NICHOLAS is coming slowly towards him)

NICHOLAS I say?

LATIMER Yes?

NICHOLAS (*thoughtfully*) I say, what would you—I mean—supposing—— Because you see—I mean, it isn't as if—— Of course, now—— (*He looks at his watch and finishes up sadly*) Half an hour Well, I suppose I must be getting ready (*He goes towards the door*)

LATIMER (*as he gets there*) Er—Nicholas

NICHOLAS Yes?

LATIMER Just a moment

NICHOLAS (*coming back to him*) Yes?

(LATIMER takes him by the arm, and looks round the room to see that they are alone)

LATIMER (*in a loud whisper*) Cheer up!

NICHOLAS (*excitedly*): What?

(LATIMER has let go of his arm and moved away, humming casually to himself The light dies out of NICHOLAS'S eyes, and he shrugs his shoulders despairingly)

NICHOLAS (*without any hope*) Well, I'll go and get ready
[*He goes out*]

(DOMINIC comes in and begins to rearrange the breakfast-table)

LATIMER Ah, good morning, Dominic

DOMINIC Good morning, sir A niceish morning it seems to be, sir

LATIMER A very niceish morning I have great hopes of the world to-day

DOMINIC I am very glad to hear it, sir

LATIMER We must all do what we can, Dominic

DOMINIC That's the only way, isn't it, sir?

LATIMER Great hopes, great hopes

DOMINIC (*handing him "The Times"*) The paper, sir

LATIMER Thank you (*He looks at the front page*)
Any one married this morning? Dear me, quite a lot
One, two, three, four ten Ten! Twenty happy people, Dominic!

DOMINIC Let us hope so, sir

LATIMER Let us hope so By the way, how was his lordship this morning?

DOMINIC A little depressed, sir

LATIMER Ah!

DOMINIC There seems to have been some misunderstanding about his luggage A little carelessness on the part of somebody, I imagine, sir

LATIMER Dear me! Didn't it come with him?

DOMINIC I'm afraid not, sir

LATIMER Tut, tut, how careless of somebody Can't we lend him anything?

DOMINIC Joseph offered to lend him a comb, sir—his own comb—a birthday present last year, Joseph tells me His lordship decided not to avail himself of the offer

LATIMER Very generous of Joseph, seeing that it was a birthday present

DOMINIC Yes, sir Unfortunately Joseph had come down to the last blade of his safety razor this morning His lordship is rather upset about the whole business, sir

LATIMER Well, well, I daresay a little breakfast will do him good.

DOMINIC Yes, sir Are you ready for breakfast now, sir?

(ANNE comes in *All this is rather fun She is not*

so sure of LEONARD now, but LEONARD doesn't matter Dover is a long way off Meanwhile this is fun. The jolly house, the excitement of not knowing what will happen next, and MR LATIMER—to be put in his place)

LATIMER (*getting up and going to her*) Good morning, Anne May I hope that you slept well?

ANNE Very well, thank you

LATIMER I am so glad All right, Dominic

DOMINIC Thank you, sir [*He goes out*]

LATIMER You are ready for breakfast?

ANNE Quite ready But what about Leonard?

LATIMER Leonard?

ANNE I made sure that I was to have a practice breakfast with Leonard this morning I have been thinking of a few things to say up in my room

LATIMER (*smiling*) Say them to me instead

ANNE They are very wifely (*She sits down*)

LATIMER But think what good practice

ANNE Very well (*At the cups*) Tea or coffee, darling?

LATIMER Oh no, that will never do You know by now that I always have coffee—half milk and three lumps of sugar

ANNE Of course, how silly of me (*She pours out the coffee*)

LATIMER (*taking the covers off the dishes*) Omelette—fish—kidney and bacon?

ANNE Now you're forgetting

LATIMER (*putting back the covers*) No, I'm remembering Toast and marmalade—isn't that right?

ANNE Quite right, dear

LATIMER (*to himself*) I knew she would like marmalade No wonder that Leonard ran away with her (*He puts the toast and marmalade close to her*)

ANNE Your coffee, darling

LATIMER Thank you, my love “My love” is very connubial, I think

ANNE: Delightfully so Do go on

LATIMER Er—I am sorry to see in the paper this morning—which I glanced at, my precious, before you came down— How do you like “My precious”?

ANNE Wonderfully life-like Are you sure you haven't been married before ?

LATIMER Only once Eustasia You had not forgotten Eustasia ?

ANNE I am afraid I had In fact, I had forgotten for the moment that you were being Leonard

LATIMER (*bowing*) Thank you I could wish no better compliment

ANNE (*laughing in spite of herself*) Oh, you're too absurd

LATIMER (*in LEONARD'S manner*) Of course I don't wish to say anything against Eustasia——

ANNE My dear Leonard, I really think we might leave your first wife out of it

LATIMER Yes, you want to get that off pat You'll have to say that a good deal, I expect Well, to resume I am sorry to see in the paper this morning that Beelzebub, upon whom I laid my shirt for the 2 30 race at Newmarket yesterday—and incidentally your shirt too, darling—came in last, some five minutes after the others had finished the course Tut, tut, how annoying !

ANNE Oh, my poor darling !

LATIMER The word "poor" is well chosen We are ruined I shall have to work

ANNE You know what I want you to do, Leonard ?

LATIMER No, I have forgotten

ANNE (*seriously*) I should like to see you in the House of Lords, taking your rightful place as a leader of men, making great speeches

LATIMER My dear Anne ! I may be a peer, but I am not a dashed politician

ANNE (*wistfully*) I wish you were, Leonard

LATIMER I will be anything you like, Anne (*He leans towards her, half-serious, half-mocking*)

ANNE (*with a little laugh*) How absurd you are ! Some more coffee ?

LATIMER (*passing his cup*) To which I answer, "A little more milk" Do you realise that this goes on for fifty years ?

ANNE Well, and why not ?

LATIMER Fifty years A solemn thought. But do not let it mar our pleasure in the meal that we are having

together now Let us continue to talk gaily together Tell me of any interesting dream you may have had last night—any little adventure that befell you in the bath—any bright thought that occurred to you as you were dressing

ANNE (*thoughtfully*) I had a very odd dream last night

LATIMER I am longing to hear it, my love

ANNE I dreamt that you and I were running away together, Leonard, and that we lost our way and came to what we thought was an hotel But it was not an hotel It was a very mysterious house, kept by a very mysterious man called Mr Latimer

LATIMER How very odd Latimer? Latimer? No, I don't seem to have heard of the fellow

ANNE He told us that we were his prisoners That we must stay in his house a week before we went on our way again That all the doors were locked, and there were high walls round the garden, that the gates from the garden were locked, so that we could not escape, and that we must wait a week together in his house to see if we were really suited to each other

LATIMER My dear, what an extraordinary dream!

ANNE It was only a dream, wasn't it?

LATIMER Of course! What is there mysterious about this house? What is there mysterious about this—er—Mr Latimer? And as for any one being kept prisoner—here—in this respectable England—why!

ANNE It is absurd, isn't it?

LATIMER Quite ridiculous

ANNE (*getting up—now she will show him*) I thought it was (*She goes to the front door and turns the handle To her surprise the door opens But MR LATIMER mustn't know that she is surprised*) You see, I thought it was! (*She steps out into the garden*) You see, the gates are open too! (*She comes back*) What an absurd dream to have had! (*She sits down again*)

LATIMER There's no accounting for dreams I had an absurd one too last night

ANNE What was it?

LATIMER A lonely house Father and daughter living together Father old, selfish, absorbed in his work

Daughter left to herself, her only companion, books, knowing nothing of the world. A man comes into her life—the first. He makes much of her. It is a new experience for the daughter. She is grateful to him, so grateful, so very proud that she means anything to him. He tells her when it is too late that he is married, talks of an impossible wife, tells her that she is his real mate. Let her come with him and see something of the world which she has never known. She comes. Dear me, what silly things one dreams!

ANNE Absurd things. (*So he knows! He knows all about it! But she will not be treated as a child. She will carry it off yet.*) When can we have the car? (*Now she is carrying it off.*)

LATIMER The car?

ANNE Leonard's car.

LATIMER You wish to continue the adventure?

ANNE Why not?

LATIMER Dear, dear! What a pity! (*Looking at his watch.*) In twenty-five minutes?

ANNE That will do nicely, thank you.

LATIMER We must let Leonard have a little breakfast first, if he is to cross the Channel to-day. (*He gets up.*) In twenty-five minutes then.

ANNE (*half holding out her hand.*) I shall see you again?

LATIMER (*bending over it.*) If only to wish you God-speed.

(*She looks at him for a moment, and then turns and goes out. He picks up his paper and settles with it in an arm-chair, his back to the breakfast-table. LEONARD comes in. He is in a dirty, rather disreputable, once white, bath-gown. His hair is unbrushed, his cheeks—the cheeks of a dark man—unshaved and blue. He has a horrible pair of bedroom slippers on his feet, above which, not only his socks, but almost a hint of pantaloons, may be seen on the way to the dressing-gown. He comes in nervously, and is greatly relieved to find that the breakfast-table is empty. He does not notice MR. LATIMER. On his way to the table he stops at a mirror.*)

on the wall, and standing in front of it, tries to persuade himself that his chin is not so bad after all. Then he pours himself out some coffee, helps himself to a kipper and falls to ravenously.)

LATIMER Ah, good morning, Leonard

LEONARD (*starting violently and turning round*) Good Lord! I didn't know you were there

LATIMER You were so hungry I trust you slept well

LEONARD Slept well! Of all the damned draughty rooms— Yes, and what about my luggage?

LATIMER (*surprised*) Your luggage?

LEONARD Yes, never put on the car, your fellow, what's his name—Joseph says

LATIMER Dear me, we must enquire into this. Lost your luggage? Dear me, that's a very unfortunate start for a honeymoon. That means bad luck, Leonard (*DOMINIC comes in*) Dominic, what's this about his lordship's luggage?

DOMINIC Joseph tells me there must have been some misunderstanding about it, sir. A little carelessness on the part of somebody, I imagine, sir

LATIMER Dear me! Didn't it come with him?

DOMINIC I'm afraid not, sir

LATIMER Tut, tut, how careless of somebody! Thank you, Dominic

DOMINIC Thank you, sir [*He goes out*]

LATIMER Lost your luggage. How excessively annoying! (*Anxiously*) My dear Leonard, what is it?

LEONARD (*whose face has been shaping for it for some seconds*) A-tish-oo!

LATIMER: At any rate I can find you a handkerchief (*He does so* LEONARD takes it just in time, and sneezes violently again)

LEONARD Thank you

LATIMER Not at all. That's a very nasty cold you've got. How wise of you to have kept on a dressing-gown

LEONARD The only thing I had to put on

LATIMER But surely you were travelling in a suit yesterday? I seem to remember a brown suit

LEONARD That fool of a man of yours——

LATIMER (*distressed*) You don't mean to tell me——
(DOMINIC *comes in*) Dominic, what's this about his lordship's brown suit?

DOMINIC Owing to a regrettable misunderstanding, sir, his lordship's luggage——

LATIMER Yes, but I'm not talking about his twenty-five other suits, I mean the nice brown suit that he was wearing yesterday. It must be somewhere. I remember noticing it. I remember—— (*He holds up his hand*) Just a moment, Dominic——

LEONARD A-tish-oo!

LATIMER I remember saying to myself, "What a nice brown suit Leonard is wearing." Well, where is it, Dominic?

DOMINIC Yes, sir. I seem to remember the suit to which you are referring. I regret to say that Joseph had an unfortunate accident with it.

LEONARD (*growling*) Damned carelessness.

DOMINIC Joseph was bringing back the clothes after brushing them, sir, and happened to have them in his arms while bending over the bath in order to test the temperature of the water for his lordship. A little surprised by the unexpected heat of the water, Joseph relinquished the clothes for a moment, and precipitated them into the bath.

LATIMER Dear me, how extremely careless of Joseph!

DOMINIC Yes, sir, I have already reprimanded him.

LEONARD The fellow ought to be shot.

LATIMER You're quite right, Leonard. Dominic, shoot Joseph this morning.

DOMINIC Yes, sir.

LATIMER And see that his lordship's suit is dried as soon as possible.

DOMINIC Yes, sir. It is being dried now, sir.

LATIMER But it must be dried thoroughly, Dominic. His lordship has a nasty cold, and——

LEONARD A-tish-oo!

LATIMER A very nasty one. I'm afraid you are subject to colds, Leonard?

LEONARD The first one I've ever had in my life.

LATIMER Do you hear that, Dominic? The first one he's ever had in his life

DOMINIC Yes, sir If you remember, sir, Mr Nicholas, and one or two other gentlemen who have slept there, caught a very nasty cold Almost looks as if there must be something the matter with the room

LEONARD Damned draughtiest room——

LATIMER Dear me! You should have told me of this before We must have the room seen to at once And be sure that his lordship has a different room to-night

DOMINIC Yes, sir, thank you, sir [He goes out]

LATIMER (*sympathetically*) My dear fellow, I am distressed beyond words But you know the saying, "Feed a cold, starve a fever" You must eat, you must eat (*He pushes all the dishes round LEONARD*) We must be firm with this cold We must suffocate it (*Pressing more dishes upon him*) You were quite right not to shave The protection offered by the beard, though small, is salutary But I was forgetting—perhaps your razor is lost too?

LEONARD Damned careless fellows!

LATIMER I must lend you mine

LEONARD (*feeling his chin*) I say, I wish you would

LATIMER I will get it at once Meanwhile, eat No half measures with this cold of yours My poor fellow!

(*He hurries out Just as LEONARD is getting busy with his breakfast again, ANNE comes in*)

ANNE Leonard, my dear! (*She observes him more thoroughly*) My dear Leonard!

LEONARD (*his mouth full*) G'morning, Anne

ANNE (*coldly*) Good morning

LEONARD (*getting up, napkin in hand*) How are you this morning? (*He comes towards her, wiping his mouth*)

ANNE No, please go on with your breakfast (*In alarm*) What is it?

(*His face assumes an agonised expression He sneezes ANNE shudders*)

LEONARD Got a nasty cold Can't understand it First I've ever had in my life

ANNE Do you sneeze like that much?

LEONARD Off and on.

Hadn't you better get on with your breakfast?..

LEONARD: Well, I will if you don't mind. Good thing for a cold, isn't it? That a lot

ANNE: I really know very little about colds. Do get on with your breakfast.

LEONARD (*going back*) Well, I will, if you don't mind. You had yours?

ANNE: Yes.

LEONARD: That's right. (*Resuming it*) Did you have one of these kippers?

ANNE: No.

LEONARD: Ah! A pity. I will say that for Latimer's cook. She knows how to do a kipper. Much more difficult than people think.

ANNE: I really know very little about kippers.

LEONARD: I have often wondered why somebody doesn't invent one without bones. (*He takes a mouthful*) Seeing what science can do nowadays— (*He stops. ANNE'S eye is on him. He says nothing, but waves his hand for her to look the other way.*)

ANNE: What is it? (*He frowns fiercely and continues to wave. She turns away coldly.*) I beg your pardon. (*He removes a mouthful of bones.*)

LEONARD (*cheerfully*): Right oh, darling. After all, what do they want all these bones for? Other fish manage without them. (*He continues his kipper.*)

ANNE: Leonard, when you can spare me a moment I should like to speak to you.

LEONARD (*eating*): My darling, all my time is yours.

ANNE: I should like your undivided attention if I can have it.

LEONARD: Fire away, darling, I'm listening.

ANNE (*going up to him*): Have you finished your—kipper? (*She takes the plate away.*) What are you going to have next?

LEONARD: Well—what do you recommend?

ANNE (*taking off a cover*): Omelette? I don't think it has any bones.

LEONARD: What's in that other dish? (*She takes off the cover.*) Kidneys? What are the kidneys like?

ANNE: Well, you can see what they look like.

LEONARD Did you try one ?

ANNE (*impatiently*) They're delightful, I tried several (*She helps him*) There ! Got the toast ? Butter ? Salt ? What is it ?

LEONARD Pepper

ANNE Pepper—there Now have you got everything ?

LEONARD Yes, thank you, my dear (*He picks up his knife and fork*)

ANNE (*putting them down again*) Then before you actually begin, I have something I want to say to you

LEONARD You're very mysterious What is it ?

ANNE There is nothing mysterious about it at all It's perfectly plain and obvious Only I do want you to grasp it

LEONARD Well ? (*He blows his nose She waits for him to finish*) Well ? (*He is still flourishing his handkerchief She waits patiently He puts it back in his pocket*) Well ?

ANNE The car will be here in a quarter of an hour

LEONARD The car ?

ANNE The automobile

LEONARD But whose ?

ANNE Ours More accurately, yours

LEONARD But what for ?

ANNE (*patiently*) We are running away together, dear You and I It had slipped your memory perhaps, but I assure you it is a fact The car will take us to Dover, and the boat will take us to Calais, and the train will take us to the South of France You and I, dear When you've finished your breakfast

LEONARD But what about Latimer ?

ANNE Just you and I, dear Two of us only The usual number. We shall not take Mr Latimer

LEONARD My dear Anne, you seem quite to have forgotten that this confounded fellow Latimer has got us prisoners here until he chooses to let us go (*With dignity*) I have not forgotten I eat his kidneys now, but he shall hear from me afterwards Damned interference !

ANNE Have you been dreaming, Leonard ? Before all these kippers and kidneys and things ?

LEONARD Dreaming ?

ANNE The car will be here in a quarter of an hour. Why not? It is *your* car. This is England, this is the twentieth century. We missed the boat and spent the night here. We go on our way this morning. Why not?

LEONARD Well, you know. I said last night it was perfectly ridiculous for Latimer to talk that way. I mean, what has it got to do with *him*? Just a bit of leg-pulling—that's what I felt all the time. Stupid joke. (*Picking up his knife and fork*) Bad taste too.

ANNE You did hear what I said, didn't you? The car will be here in a quarter of an hour. I don't know how long it takes you to—(*she glances him over*) to shave, and—and dress properly, and—and brush your hair, but I fancy you ought to be thinking about it quite seriously. (*Kindly*) You can have some more kidneys another time.

LEONARD B-but I can't possibly go like this.

ANNE No, that's what I say.

LEONARD: I mean I haven't got any luggage for one thing—and, with a cold like this, I'm not at all sure—

ANNE You've lost your luggage?

LEONARD Apparently it was left behind by—

ANNE (*with anger*) You let yourself be tricked and humiliated by this Mr. Latimer, you let *me* be humiliated, and then when I say that, whatever happens, I won't be humiliated, you—you lose your luggage!

LEONARD I didn't lose it. It just happens to *be* lost.

ANNE And you catch a cold!

LEONARD I didn't catch it. It caught *me*.

ANNE The—the humiliation of it! And what do you propose to do now?

LEONARD As soon as my luggage turns up, and I am well enough to travel—

ANNE Meanwhile you accept this man's hospitality—

LEONARD Under protest. (*Helping himself from the dish*) I shall keep a careful account of everything that we have here—

ANNE Well, that's your third kidney, you'd better make a note of it.

LEONARD (*with dignity*) As it happens I was helping myself to a trifle more bacon. As I say, I shall keep a

careful account, and send him a cheque for our board and lodging as soon as we have left his roof

ANNE Oh! I had some coffee and one slice of toast and a little marmalade About a spoonful And a cup of tea and two thin slices of bread and butter upstairs Oh, and I've had two baths. They're extra, aren't they? A hot one last night and a cold one this morning I think that's all Except supper last night, and you wouldn't let me finish that, so I expect there'll be a reduction You want a notebook with one of those little pencils in it

LEONARD (*reproachfully*) I say, Anne, look here——

ANNE Do go on with your breakfast

LEONARD You're being awfully unfair How can we possibly go now? Why, I haven't even got a pair of trousers to put on

ANNE You're not going to say you've lost those too!

LEONARD (*sulkily*) It's not my fault That fellow—What's his name——

ANNE (*wonderingly*) What made you ever *think* that you could take anybody to the South of France? Without any practice at all? Now, if you had been taking an aunt to Hammersmith—well, you might have lost a bus or two and your hat might have blown off and you would probably have found yourselves at Hampstead the first two or three times and your aunt would have stood up the whole way but still you might have got there eventually I mean, it would be worth trying—if your aunt was very anxious to get to Hammersmith But the South of France! My dear Leonard! It's so audacious of you

LEONARD (*annoyed*) Now, look here, Anne——

(MR LATIMER *comes in cheerily with shaving-pot, brush, safety-razor, and towel*)

LATIMER Now then, Leonard, we'll soon have you all right (*He puts the things down*) Ah, Anne! You don't mind waiting while Leonard has a shave? He wanted to grow a special beard for the Continent, but I persuaded him not to The French accent will be quite enough (*Picking up the razor*) Do you mind Wednesday's blade? I used Tuesday's myself this morning

ANNE (*all sweetness in a moment*) Oh, Mr Latimer, I find that we shall not want the car after all

LATIMER No ?

ANNE No Poor Leonard is hardly well enough to travel I hope that by to-morrow, perhaps—— But I am afraid that we must trespass on your hospitality until then I am so sorry

LATIMER But I am charmed to have you Let me tell your maid to unpack

ANNE Don't trouble, thanks I've got to take my hat off (*Very lovingly for LATIMER'S benefit*) I shan't be a moment, Leonard darling

(*She goes out, her chin in the air She is still carrying it off*)

LATIMER Now then, Leonard darling, to work

LEONARD (*picking up the things*) Thanks

LATIMER But where are you going ?

LEONARD Upstairs, of course

LATIMER Is that wise ? With a cold like yours ?

LEONARD Damn it, I can't shave down here

LATIMER Oh, come, we mustn't stand on ceremony when your life is at stake You were complaining only five minutes ago of the draught in your room Now, here we have a nice even temperature——

LEONARD Well, there's something in that

LATIMER There's everything in it Of course you've never had a cold before, so you don't know, but any doctor will tell you how important it is to stay in one room—with a nice even temperature You mustn't dream of going upstairs

LEONARD (*surrendering*) Well——

LATIMER That's right. Got everything you want ? There are plenty of mirrors Which period do you prefer ? Queen Anne ?

LEONARD It's all right, thanks

LATIMER Good Then I'll leave you to it

(*He goes out Standing in front of a glass on the wall, LEONARD applies the soap. His cheeks are just getting beautifully creamy when NICHOLAS enters*)

NICHOLAS Hallo !

LEONARD (*looking round*) Hallo !

NICHOLAS Shaving ?

LEONARD (*exasperated*) Well, what the devil did you think I was doing ?

NICHOLAS Shaving (*He sits down* LEONARD *gets on with the good work*)

LEONARD A-tish-oo !

NICHOLAS Got a cold

LEONARD Obviously

NICHOLAS (*sympathetically*) Horrid, sneezing when you're all covered with soap

LEONARD Look here, I didn't ask for your company, and I don't want your comments

NICHOLAS Well, if it comes to that, I was here first, and I didn't ask you to shave in the hall

LEONARD (*with dignity*) There are reasons why it is necessary for me to shave in the hall

NICHOLAS Don't bother to tell me I know 'em

LEONARD What do you mean ?

NICHOLAS You're the couple that arrived last night

LEONARD (*looking at him, thoughtfully*) And you're the couple that is leaving this morning

NICHOLAS Exactly

LEONARD Yes, but I don't see——

NICHOLAS You haven't tumbled to it yet ?

LEONARD Tumbled to what ?

NICHOLAS The fact that a week ago there were reasons why it was necessary for *me* to shave in the hall

LEONARD You ! You don't mean——

NICHOLAS Yes, I do

LEONARD You lost your luggage ?

NICHOLAS Yes

LEONARD You woke up with a cold ?

NICHOLAS Yes . Horrid, sneezing when you're all covered with soap

LEONARD (*excitedly*) I say, that fellow—what's 'is name—didn't drop *your* clothes in the bath ?

NICHOLAS Oh, rather . Damned smart chap, Latimer.

LEONARD Damned scoundrel

NICHOLAS Oh no He's quite right One learns a lot down here.

LEONARD I shall leave his house at once as soon as I have shaved

NICHOLAS You still want to ? (LEONARD *looks at him in surprise*) Oh, well, you've hardly been here long enough, I suppose

LEONARD What do you mean ? Don't *you* want to any more ?

NICHOLAS Latimer's quite right you know One learns a lot down here

LEONARD (*shaving*) What about the lady ?

NICHOLAS That's the devil of it

LEONARD My dear fellow, as a man of honour, you're bound to go on

NICHOLAS As a man of honour, ought I ever to have started ?

LEONARD (*little knowing*) Naturally I can't give an opinion on that

NICHOLAS No You want to be careful with that glass The light isn't too good I should go over it all again

LEONARD (*stiffly*) Thank you I am accustomed to shaving myself

NICHOLAS I was just offering a little expert advice You needn't take it

LEONARD (*surveying himself doubtfully*) H'm, perhaps you're right (*He lathers himself again, In the middle of it he stops and says*) Curious creatures, women

NICHOLAS Amazing

LEONARD It's a life's work in itself trying to understand 'em And then you're no further

NICHOLAS A week told *me* all I wanted to know

LEONARD They're so unexpected

NICHOLAS So unreasonable

LEONARD What was it the poet said about them ?

NICHOLAS What didn't he say ?

LEONARD No, *you* know the one I mean How does it begin ? "O woman, in our hours of ease——"

NICHOLAS "Uncertain, coy and hard to please"

LEONARD That's it Well, I grant you *that*——

NICHOLAS Grant it me ! I should think you do ! They throw it at you with both hands

LEONARD But in the next two lines he misses the point altogether When—what is it?—“When pain and anguish wring the brow”——

NICHOLAS (*with feeling*) “A ministering angel thou”

LEONARD Yes, and it’s a lie It’s simply a lie

NICHOLAS My dear fellow, it’s the truest thing anybody ever said Only—only one gets too much of it

LEONARD True? Nonsense!

NICHOLAS Evidently you don’t know anything about women

LEONARD (*indignant*) I! Not know anything about women

NICHOLAS Well, you said yourself just now that you didn’t

LEONARD I never said—— What I said——

NICHOLAS If you did know anything about ’em, you’d know that there’s nothing they like more than doing the ministering angel business

LEONARD Ministering angel!

NICHOLAS Won’t you have a little more of this, and won’t you have a little more of that, and how is the poor cold to-day, and——

LEONARD You really think that women talk like that?

NICHOLAS How else do you think they talk?

LEONARD My dear fellow! . Why, I mean, just take my own case as an example Here am I, with a very nasty cold, the first I’ve ever had in my life I sit down for a bit of breakfast—not wanting it particularly, but feeling that, for the sake of my health, I ought to try and eat something And what happens?

(LATIMER *has come in during this speech He stops and listens to it*)

LATIMER (*trying to guess the answer*) You eat too much

LEONARD (*turning round angrily*) Ah, so it’s you! You have come just in time, Mr Latimer I propose to leave your house at once,

LATIMER (*surprised*) Not like that? Not with a little bit of soap behind the ear? (LEONARD *hastily wipes it*) The other ear (LEONARD *wipes that one*) That’s right

LEONARD At once, sir.

NICHOLAS You’d better come with us We’re just going

LEONARD Thank you

LATIMER Four of you A nice little party

ANNE *comes in*

LEONARD Anne, my dear, we are leaving the house at once Are you ready ?

ANNE But——

EUSTASIA (*from outside*) Nich-o-las !

(LEONARD *looks up in astonishment*)

NICHOLAS (*gloomily*) Hallo !

EUSTASIA Where are you ?

NICHOLAS Here !

EUSTASIA *comes in*

EUSTASIA Are you ready, darling ? (*She stops on seeing them all, and looks from one to the other She sees her husband*) Leonard !

NICHOLAS (*understanding*) Leonard !

LEONARD Eustasia !

ANNE Eustasia !

(*They stare at each other—open-mouthed—all but*

MR LATIMER MR LATIMER *has picked up "The Times," and seems to have forgotten that they are there*)

ANNE (*after hours and hours*) Oh, isn't anybody going to say anything ? Mr Latimer, while Leonard is thinking of something, you might introduce me to his wife

LATIMER (*recalled suddenly from the leading article*) I beg your pardon ! Eustasia, this is Anne

ANNE How do you do ? (*Not that she minds*)

EUSTASIA How do you do ? (*Nor she*)

LATIMER Leonard, this is Nicholas

NICHOLAS (*nodding*) We've met Quite old friends

LEONARD (*indignantly*) I repudiate the friendship We met under false pretences I—I—Well, upon my word, I don't know *what* to say

NICHOLAS Then don't say it, old boy Here we all are, and we've got to make the best of it

LEONARD I—I—a-tish-oo !

EUSTASIA (*alarmed*) Leonard, you have a cold ?

NICHOLAS A very nasty cold.

ANNE (*coldly*). It will be better when he has finished his breakfast

LEONARD (*hurt*) I have finished my breakfast A long time ago

ANNE I beg your pardon (*She indicates the towel round his neck*) I misunderstood

LEONARD (*pulling it away*) I've been shaving

EUSTASIA But, Leonard dear, I don't understand I've never known you ill before

LEONARD I never have been ill before But I am ill now. Very ill And nobody minds Nobody minds at all This fellow Latimer invaygles me here—

LATIMER Inveegles

LEONARD I shall pronounce it how I like It is quite time I asserted myself I have been too patient You invaygle me here and purposely give me a cold You—(*pointing accusingly to ANNE*)—are entirely unmoved by my sufferings, instead of which you make fun of the very simple breakfast which I had forced myself to eat You—(*to NICHOLAS*)—run away with my wife, at a time when I am ill and unable to protect her, and you—(*to EUSTASIA*)—well, all I can say is that you surprise me, Eustasia, you surprise me I didn't think you had it in you

LATIMER A masterly summing up of the case Well, I hope you're all ashamed of yourselves

EUSTASIA But, Leonard, how rash of you to *think* of running away with a cold like this (*She goes up and comforts him*) You must take care of yourself—Eustasia will take care of you and get you well Poor boy! He had a nasty, nasty, cold and nobody looked after him Mr Latimer, I shall want some mustard, and hot water, and eucalyptus.

LATIMER. But of course!

LEONARD (*to ANNE*) There you are! As soon as somebody who really understands illness comes on the scene, you see what happens Mustard, hot water, eucalyptus—she has it all at her finger-ends

Enter DOMINIC

DOMINIC. Yes, sir?

LATIMER: A small mustard and water for his lordship.

EUSTASIA It's to put his feet in, not to drink.

LATIMER. A large mustard and water

DOMINIC. Yes, sir

EUSTASIA Hot water

DOMINIC Yes, my lady

EUSTASIA And if you have any eucalyptus——

DOMINIC Yes, my lady, we got some in specially for his lordship

LATIMER Did Mr Nicholas absorb all the last bottle ?

DOMINIC Yes, sir

NICHOLAS (*with feeling*) I fairly lived on it

DOMINIC (*to EUSTASIA*) Is there anything else his lordship will require ?

NICHOLAS What about a mustard-plaster ?

LEONARD Please mind your own business

EUSTASIA No, I don't think there's anything else, thank you

NICHOLAS Well, I call that very unfair I had one

LEONARD (*asserting his rights as a husband*) Oh, did you ? Well, in that case, Eustasia, I certainly don't see why——

LATIMER (*to DOMINIC*) Two mustard-plasters We mustn't grudge his lordship anything

DOMINIC Yes, sir

[*He retires*]

EUSTASIA (*to LEONARD*) Now come over here, darling, away from the door (*She leads him to an arm-chair in the corner of the room*) Lean on me

ANNE Surely one can walk with a cold in the head !

NICHOLAS No, it's very dangerous

LATIMER Nicholas speaks as an expert

EUSTASIA (*settling LEONARD*) There ! Is that comfy ?

LEONARD Thank you, Eustasia

EUSTASIA We'll soon have you all right, dear

LEONARD (*pressing her hand*) Thank you.

LATIMER (*after a little silence*) Well, as Nicholas said just now, " Here we all are, and we've got to make the best of it." What are we all going to do ?

ANNE Please leave me out of it (*She is beaten, but that doesn't matter The only thing that matters now is to get out of this horrible house*) I can make my own arrangements (*She gives them a cool little bow as she goes out*) If you will excuse me

(DOMINIC comes in with a clinical thermometer on a tray)

DOMINIC I thought that her ladyship might require a thermometer for his lordship's temperature

EUSTASIA Thank you I think it would be safer just to take it And I wondered if we couldn't just put this screen round his lordship's chair

DOMINIC Certainly, my lady, one can't be too careful
(*He helps her with it*)

LUSTASIA Yes, that's right

LATIMER (*to* NICHOLAS) Did *you* have the screen?

NICHOLAS Oh, rather

LATIMER And the thermometer?

NICHOLAS Yes Funny thing was I liked it just at first I don't mean the actual thermometer, I mean all the fussing

LATIMER It's a wonderful invention, a cold in the head it finds you out There's nothing like it, Nicholas, nothing

EUSTASIA (*to* DOMINIC) Thank you And you're bringing the other things?

DOMINIC Yes, my lady, as soon as ready

[*He goes out*]

EUSTASIA Thank you (*To* LEONARD) Now, dear, under the tongue (*She puts it in his mouth*)

LEONARD (*mumbling*) I don't think I ever——

EUSTASIA No, dear, don't try to talk

(*And now it is the turn of* NICHOLAS)

NICHOLAS (*coming close to* LATIMER) I say——

LATIMER Well?

NICHOLAS (*indicating the screen*) I say, not too loud

LATIMER (*in a whisper*) Well?

NICHOLAS Well, what about it?

LATIMER What about what?

NICHOLAS I mean, where do I come in? As a man of honour, oughtn't I to—er—— You see what I mean? Of course I want to do the right thing

LATIMER Naturally, my dear Nicholas It's what one expected of you

NICHOLAS I thought that if I slipped away now, unostentatiously

LATIMER With just a parting word of farewell——

NICHOLAS Well, that was what I was wondering Would anything in the nature of a farewell be in good taste?

LATIMER I see your point

NICHOLAS Don't think that I'm not just as devoted to Eustasia as ever I was

LATIMER But you feel that in the circumstances you could worship her from afar with more propriety

NICHOLAS (*waving a hand at the screen*) Yes You see, I had no idea that they were so devoted

LATIMER But their devotion may not last for ever

NICHOLAS Exactly That's why I thought I'd slip away now

LATIMER Oh, Nicholas ! Oh, Nicholas !

NICHOLAS (*a little offended*) Well, I don't want to say anything against Eustasia——

LATIMER The house is full of people who don't want to say anything against Eustasia

NICHOLAS But, you see—— Look out, here's Miss Anne

ANNE *comes in*

LATIMER Anne, you're just in time Nicholas wants your advice

NICHOLAS I say, shut up ! We can't very well——

ANNE (*with all that is left of her dignity, but she is only a child after all*) Mr Latimer, I went upstairs to get my things and find my way to the nearest railway station But—but there is a reason why I am not going after all Just yet I thought I'd better tell you

LATIMER Were you really thinking of going ? (*She nods*) I'm so glad you've changed your mind

ANNE (*with a smile*) There are reasons why I had to

LATIMER Bless them ! Nicholas, I believe she stayed just so that she might help you

ANNE What does Mr Nicholas want ?

NICHOLAS I say, it's awfully good of you and all that, but this is rather—I mean, it's a question that a fellow ought to settle for himself

LATIMER What he means is, ought *he* to get his things and find his way to the nearest railway station ?

ANNE (*dismayed*) Oh no !

LATIMER There you are, Nicholas

NICHOLAS (*rather flattered*) Oh, well—well—— (*He looks at her admiringly*) Well, perhaps you're right

EUSTASIA (*the three minutes up*) There ! (*She takes*

the thermometer out and comes from behind the screen in order to get nearer the light)

LATIMER His temperature ! This is an exciting moment in the history of the House of Lords *(He follows EUSTASIA to the window)*

NICHOLAS *(to ANNE)* I say, do you really think I ought to stay ?

ANNE Please, Mr Nicholas, I want you to stay

NICHOLAS Righto ! then I'll stay

LATIMER *(over EUSTASIA'S shoulder)* A hundred and nine

LEONARD *(putting his head round the screen)* I say, what ought it to be ?

NICHOLAS Ninety-eight

LEONARD Good Lord ! I'm dying !

EUSTASIA It's just ninety-nine A little over normal, Leonard, but nothing to matter

LATIMER Ninety-nine—so it is I should never have forgiven myself if it had been a hundred and nine

NICHOLAS *(coming up to LATIMER)* It's all right, I'm going to

EUSTASIA *(surprised)* Going to ? Going to what ?

NICHOLAS *(confused)* Oh, nothing

LATIMER What he means is that he is going to be firm He thinks we all ought to have a little talk about things Just to see where we are

EUSTASIA Well, things aren't quite as they were, are they ? If I'd known that Leonard was ill—but I've seen so little of him lately And he's *never* been ill before !

NICHOLAS Of course we ought to know where we are

LATIMER Yes At present Leonard is behind that screen, which makes it difficult to discuss things properly Leonard, could you——

EUSTASIA Oh, we mustn't take any risks ! But if we moved the screen a little, and all sat up at that end of the room——

LATIMER Delightful !

NICHOLAS *(leading the way)* Sit here, Miss Anne, won't you ?

(They arrange themselves LATIMER in the middle)

LATIMER There ! Now, are we all here ? We are

Then with your permission, Ladies and Gentlemen, I will open the proceedings with a short speech

NICHOLAS Oh, I say, must you ?

LATIMER Certainly

EUSTASIA (*to LEONARD*) Hush, dear

LEONARD I didn't say anything

EUSTASIA No, but you were just going to

LATIMER (*severely*) Seeing that I refrained from making my speech when Leonard had the thermometer in his mouth, the least he can do now is to listen in silence

LEONARD Well, I'm ---

LATIMER I resume By a fortunate concatenation of circumstances, ladies and gentlemen—or, as more illiterate men would say, by a bit of luck—two runaway couples have met under my roof No need to mention names You can all guess for yourselves But I call now—this is the end of my speech, Leonard—I call now upon my noble friend on the right to tell us just why he left the devoted wife by his side in order to travel upon the Continent

LEONARD Well, really—

LATIMER Naturally Leonard does not wish to say anything against Eustasia Very creditable to him But can it be that the devoted wife by his side wishes to say anything against Leonard ?

EUSTASIA You neglected me, Leonard, you know you did And when I was so ill—

LEONARD My dear, you were *always* ill That was the trouble

LATIMER And you were never ill, Leonard *That* was the trouble . You heartless ruffian !

EUSTASIA (*to LEONARD*) Hush, dear

LATIMER Why couldn't you have had a cold sometimes ? Why couldn't you have come home with a broken leg, or lost your money, or made a rotten speech in the House of Lords ? If she could never be sorry for *you*, for whom else could she be sorry, except herself ? (*To EUSTASIA*) I don't suppose he even lost his umbrella, did he ?

ANNE (*feeling that anything is possible to a man who mislays his trousers*) Oh, he must have lost that

LATIMER Eustasia, ladies and gentlemen, is one of those dear women, those sweet women, those delightful women—(aside to ANNE)—stop me if I'm overdoing it—those adorable women who must always cosset or be cosseted. She couldn't cosset Leonard, Leonard wouldn't cosset her. Hence—the Dover Road.

EUSTASIA How well you understand, Mr Latimer!

LATIMER Enter, then, my friend Nicholas (*Shaking his head at him*) Oh, Nicholas! Oh, Nicholas! Oh, Nicholas!

NICHOLAS (*uneasily*) What's all that about?

LATIMER Anything you say will be used in evidence against you. Proceed, my young friend.

NICHOLAS Well—well—well—I mean, there she was.

LATIMER Lonely.

NICHOLAS Exactly.

LATIMER Neglected by her brute of a husband—(*As LEONARD opens his mouth*) fingers crossed, Leonard—who spent day and night rioting in the House of Lords while his poor little wife cried at home.

NICHOLAS Well—

LATIMER Then out spake bold Sir Nicholas—(*Aside to ANNE*) This was also composed in my bath—

Then out spake bold Sir Nicholas,

An Oxford man was he,

“Lo, I will write a note to-night

And ask her out to tea”

NICHOLAS Well, you see—

LATIMER I see, Nicholas. And so here we all are.

ANNE Except me.

LATIMER I guessed at you, Anne. Did I guess right?

ANNE (*meekly*) Yes.

LATIMER And so here we all are. And what are we all going to do? My house is at your disposal for as long as you wish. The doors are open for those who wish to go. Eustasia?

EUSTASIA My duty is to stay here—to look after my husband.

LATIMER Well, that settles Eustasia. Anne?

ANNE Of necessity I must stay here—for the present.

LATIMER Well, that settles Anne. Nicholas?

NICHOLAS I stay here too --(*looking at ANNE*) from choice

LATIMER Well, that settles Nicholas Leonard ?

(DOMINIC, *followed by all the Staff, comes in, together
with a collection of mustard-baths, plasters,
eucalyptus, etc , etc*)

LATIMER (*looking round at the interruption*) Ah !
And this will settle Leonard

(*It settles him*)

ACT III

Three days later, and evening again ANNE is busy with a pencil and paper, an ABC, and her purse. She is trying to work out how much it costs to go home, and subtracting three and fourpence ha'penny from it. Having done this, she puts the paper, pencil, and purse in her bag, returns the ABC to its home, and goes towards the door. One gathers that she has come to a decision.

ANNE (*calling*) Nich-o-las !

NICHOLAS (*from outside*) Hallo !

ANNE Where—are—you ?

NICHOLAS Coming (*He comes*) Just went upstairs to get a pipe (*Putting his hand to his pocket*) And now I've forgotten it

(They go to the sofa together.)

ANNE. Oh, Nicholas, how silly you are ! (*She sits down.*)

NICHOLAS (*sitting close*) I don't want to smoke, you know

ANNE I thought men always did

NICHOLAS Well, it depends what they're doing

(There is no doubt what he is doing. He is making love to ANNE, the dog, and ANNE is encouraging him.)

ANNE (*looking away*) Oh !

NICHOLAS I say, it has been rather jolly here the last three days, don't you think ?

ANNE It has been rather nice.

NICHOLAS. We've sort of got so friendly

ANNE We have, haven't we ?

NICHOLAS You've been awfully nice to me

ANNE You've been nice to me

NICHOLAS I should have gone, you know, if it hadn't been for you

ANNE I don't know *what* I should have done if you had gone

NICHOLAS You did ask me to stay, didn't you ?

ANNE Yes, I couldn't let you go

NICHOLAS Do you know what you said ? You said, " Please, Mr Nicholas, I want you to stay " I shall always remember that (*Fatuously to himself*) " Please, Mr Nicholas, I want you to stay " I wonder what made you think of saying that ?

ANNE I wanted us to be friends I wanted to get to know you, to make you think of me as—as your friend

NICHOLAS We *are* friends, Anne, aren't we ?

ANNE I think we are now, Nicholas

NICHOLAS (*with a sentimental sigh*) Friends !

(ANNE *looks at him, wondering if she shall risk it, then away again, then summons up her courage and takes the plunge*)

ANNE Nicholas !

NICHOLAS Yes ?

ANNE (*timidly*) I—I want you to do something for me

NICHOLAS Anything, Anne, anything

ANNE I don't know whether I ought to ask you

NICHOLAS Of course you ought !

ANNE But you see, we *are* friends—almost like brother and sister——

NICHOLAS (*disappointed*) Well, I shouldn't put it quite like that——

ANNE And I thought I might ask you——

NICHOLAS Of course, Anne ! You know I would do anything for you

ANNE Yes Well—well—— (*In a rush*) Well, then, will you lend me one pound two and sixpence till next Monday ?

NICHOLAS Lend you—— !

ANNE To-day's Friday, I'll send you the money off on Sunday I promise Of course I know one oughtn't to borrow from men, but you're different Almost like a brother. I knew you would understand.

NICHOLAS But—but—I *don't* understand

ANNE (*ashamed*) You see, I—I only have three and fourpence ha'penny And it costs one pound five and twopence to get home (*Indignantly*) Oh, it's a shame the way men always pay for us, and then when we really want money we haven't got any But I will pay you back on Sunday I have some money at home, I meant to have brought it

NICHOLAS But—but why do you suddenly——

ANNE Suddenly? I've been wanting it ever since that first morning I went upstairs to get my hat, meaning to walk straight out of the house—and then I looked in my purse and found—(*pathetically*) three and fourpence ha'penny What was I to do?

NICHOLAS Any one would have lent you anything

ANNE (*coldly*) Leonard, for instance?

NICHOLAS (*thoughtfully*) Well . . . no . . . No You couldn't very well have touched Leonard But Latimer——

ANNE Mr Latimer! The man who had brought us here, locked us up here, and started playing Providence to us—I was to go on my knees to *him* and say, "Please, dear Mr Latimer, could you lend me one pound two and sixpence, so that I may run away from your horrid house?" Really!

NICHOLAS Well, you seem to have been pretty friendly with him these three days

ANNE Naturally I am polite to a man when I am staying in his house That's different

NICHOLAS As a matter of fact, Latimer has been jolly decent Anyway, he has saved us both from making silly asses of ourselves

ANNE And you think I am grateful to him for that?

Doesn't *any* man understand *any* woman?

NICHOLAS (*annoyed*) Are you suggesting that *I* don't understand women?

ANNE I'm suggesting that you should lend me one pound two shillings and sixpence

NICHOLAS (*sulkily, feeling in his pockets*) Of course, if you're in such a confounded hurry to get away from here—— Do you mind all silver?

ANNE Not at all

NICHOLAS. In such a confounded hurry to get away from here—— (*He counts the money*)

ANNE Why ever should I want to stay ?

NICHOLAS Well—well—— (*With a despairing shrug*) Oh, Lord ! Ten shillings fourteen and six . why should she want to stay ? Why do you think I'm staying ?

ANNE (*wickedly*) Because you're so fond of Mr Latimer He's so jolly decent

NICHOLAS (*looking at the money in his hand*) One pound two shillin s and sixpence I suppose if I told you what I really thought about it all, you'd get on your high horse again and refuse the money from me So I won't tell you Here you are

ANNE (*gently*) You didn't think I was in love with you, Nicholas ? (NICHOLAS *looks uncomfortable*) In three days ? Oh, Nicholas !

NICHOLAS Well—well, I don't see—— (*He holds out the money But ANNE won't take it on those terms*)

ANNE From a friend ?

NICHOLAS From a friend

ANNE Lent to a friend ?

NICHOLAS Lent to a friend

ANNE (*taking it*) Thank you Nicholas (*She hurries out, clasping the precious money NICHOLAS will never see her again And then, suddenly, her head comes round the door*) Thank you very much, Nicholas ! (*She is gone*)

NICHOLAS Well I'm damned

(*He sits there gloomily, his legs stretched out, and regards his shoes So far as we can tell he goes on saying, "Well, I'm damned" to himself EUSTASIA and LEONARD come in He is properly dressed now, but still under EUSTASIA'S care, and she has his arm, as if he were attempting a very difficult feat in walking across the hall*)

NICHOLAS (*looking round*) Hallo ! (*Getting up*) Do you want to come here ?

LEONARD (*hastily*) Don't go, old boy, don't go Plenty of room for us all

EUSTASIA Thank you so much Leonard is not very strong yet His temperature is up again to-day (*To LEONARD*) You will be better on the sofa, darling (*Distantly to NICHOLAS*) I'm so sorry to trouble you

NICHOLAS Not at all I was just going anyhow

LEONARD (*sitting on the sofa*) Oh, nonsense Stay and talk to us Plenty of room for us all

NICHOLAS (*feeling in his pockets*) Got to get my pipe Left it upstairs, like an ass

LEONARD (*taking out his case*) Have a cigarette instead?

NICHOLAS Rather have a pipe, thanks (*He makes for the door*)

LEONARD (*anxiously*) But you'll come back?

NICHOLAS (*unwillingly*) Oh—er—righto

[*He goes out*]

LEONARD Come and keep us company (*To EUSTASIA, who is tucking him up*) Thanks, Eustasia, thanks That's quite all right

EUSTASIA Another cushion for your back, darling?

LEONARD No, thanks

EUSTASIA Quite sure?

LEONARD Quite sure, thanks

EUSTASIA I can easily get it for you

LEONARD (*weakly*) Oh, very well

EUSTASIA That's right (*Getting the cushion*) You must be comfortable Now, are you sure *that's* all right?

LEONARD Quite all right, thank you

EUSTASIA Sure, darling? Anything else you want, I can get it for you at once A rug over your knees?

LEONARD No, thank you, Eustasia (*Now he is saying it*)

EUSTASIA You wouldn't like a hot-water bottle?

LEONARD (*with a sigh*) No, thank you, Eustasia

EUSTASIA You've only got to say, you know Now shall we talk, or would you like me to read to you? (*She settles down next to him*)

LEONARD (*choosing the lesser evil*) I think read—no, I mean, talk—no, read to me

EUSTASIA It's for you to say, darling

LEONARD (*his eyes closed*) Read to me, Eustasia

EUSTASIA (*opening her book*) We'll go on from where we left off We didn't get very far—I marked the place . . . Yes, here we are “ . . . the sandy deserts of Arabia and Africa . . . 4 ” And then there's a little footnote at the bottom, that's how I remember it (*Reading the footnote*) “ Tacit. Annal 1 ii, Dion Cassius 1 lvi p 833, and the speech of Augustus himself ” That doesn't seem

to mean much "It receives great light from the learned notes of his French translator, M Spanheim" Well, that's a good thing Spanheim—sounds more like a German, doesn't it? Now are you sure you're quite comfortable, dear?

LEONARD (*his eyes closed*) Yes, thank you, Eustasia

EUSTASIA Then I'll begin (*In her reading-aloud voice*) "Happily for the repose of mankind, the moderate system recommended by the wisdom of Augustus was adopted by the fears and vices of his immediate successors Engaged in the pursuit of pleasure or the exercise of tyranny, the first Caesars seldom showed themselves to the armies or to the provinces, nor were they disposed to suffer that those triumphs which their indolence neglected should be usurped by the conduct and valour of their lieutenants," (*Speeding up*) "The military fame of a subject was considered as an insolent invasion of the Imperial prerogative, and it became the duty as well as interest of every Roman General to guard the frontiers entrusted to his care"—(*recklessly*) "without aspiring for conquests which might have proved no less fatal to himself than to the vanquished barbarians" And then there's another little footnote Perhaps it would be better if I read all the little footnotes afterwards—what do you think, darling? Or shall we take them as they come?

LEONARD (*without opening his eyes*) Yes, dear

EUSTASIA Very well This is footnote 5. "Germanicus, Suetonius Paulinus and Agricola"—(*she stumbles over the names*)—"were checked and recalled in the course of their victories Corbulo was put to death" Oh, what a shame! "Military merit, as it is admirably expressed by Tacitus, was, in the strictest sense of the word—" well, there are *two* words, and they are both in Latin I suppose Tacitus wrote in Latin But it doesn't really matter, because it's only a little footnote (*Anxiously*) Are you liking the book, darling?

LEONARD Very much, dear

EUSTASIA It's nicely written, but I don't think it's very exciting I don't think Mr. Latimer has a very good taste in books I asked him to recommend me something really interesting to read aloud, and he said that the two

most interesting books he knew were Carlyle's *French Revolution* and—and—(looking at the cover) Gibbon's *Roman Empire* Fancy, there are four volumes of it and six hundred pages in a volume We're at page 3 now (She reads a line or two to herself) Oh, now, this is rather interesting, because it's all about us "The only accession which the Roman Empire received during the first century of the Christian era was the province of Britain" Fancy! "The proximity of its situation to the coast of Gaul seemed to invite their arms, the pleasing though doubtful intelligence of a pearl fishery attracted their avarice" And then there's a little footnote—I suppose that's to say it was Whitstable (Getting to it) Oh, no—"The British pearls proved, however, of little value, on account of their dark and livid colour" How horrid "Tacitus observes—" well, then, Tacitus says something again

I wish he would write in English . Now where was I? Something about the pearls Oh yes "After a war of about forty years"—good gracious!—"undertaken by the most stupid, maintained by the most dissolute, and——"

(NICHOLAS returns with his pipe)

NICHOLAS Oh, sorry, I'm interrupting

LEONARD (waking up) No, no Eustasia was just reading to me (To her) You mustn't tire yourself, dear (To NICHOLAS) Stay and talk

NICHOLAS What's the book? Carlyle's *French Revolution*?

EUSTASIA (primly) Certainly not (Looking at the title again) Gibbon's *Roman Empire*

NICHOLAS Any good?

EUSTASIA Fascinating, isn't it, Leonard?

LEONARD Very

NICHOLAS. You ought to try Carlyle, old chap

LEONARD Is he good?

NICHOLAS (who has had eight pages read aloud to him by EUSTASIA) Oh, topping

EUSTASIA (looking at her watch) Good gracious! I ought to be dressing.

LEONARD (looking at his). Yes, it is about time

NICHOLAS (looking at his) Yes

EUSTASIA Leonard, darling I don't think it would be safe for you to change Not to-night, to-morrow if you like

LEONARD I say, look here, you said that last night

EUSTASIA Ah, but your temperature has gone up again

NICHOLAS I expect that's only because the book was so exciting

LEONARD Yes, that's right

EUSTASIA But I took his temperature *before* I began reading

NICHOLAS Perhaps yesterday's instalment was still hanging about a bit

EUSTASIA (*to* LEONARD) No, darling, not to-night Just to please his Eustasia

LEONARD (*sulkily*) All right

EUSTASIA That's a good boy (*She walks to the door, NICHOLAS going with her to open it*) And if he's very good, and Eustasia is very quick dressing, perhaps she'll read him another little bit of that nice book before dinner,

[*She goes out*]

LEONARD I say, don't go, old chap You can change in five minutes

NICHOLAS Righto

(*He comes back There is silence for a little*)

LEONARD I say!

NICHOLAS Yes?

LEONARD (*thinking better of it*) Oh, nothing

NICHOLAS (*after a pause*) Curious creatures, women

LEONARD Amazing

NICHOLAS They're so unexpected.

LEONARD So unreasonable

NICHOLAS Yes . . .

LEONARD (*suddenly*) I hate England at this time of year

NICHOLAS So do I

LEONARD Do you go South as a rule?

NICHOLAS. As a rule

LEONARD Monte?

NICHOLAS. Sometimes We *had* thought—I half thought of Nice

LEONARD Not bad. We were—I think I prefer Cannes myself.

NICHOLAS There's not much in it

LEONARD No *(After a pause)* Between ourselves, you know—quite between ourselves—I'm about fed up with women

NICHOLAS Absolutely

LEONARD You are too '

NICHOLAS Rather I should think so

LEONARD They're so dashed unreasonable

NICHOLAS So unexpected

LEONARD *(suddenly)* Had you booked your rooms ?

NICHOLAS At Nice ? Yes

LEONARD So had I

NICHOLAS At Cannes ?

LEONARD Yes I say, what about it ?

NICHOLAS Do you mean—— *(He waves a hand at the door)*

LEONARD Yes

NICHOLAS Evaporating ?

LEONARD Yes Quite quietly, you know

NICHOLAS Without ostentation

LEONARD That's it

NICHOLAS It's rather a scheme And then we shouldn't waste the rooms At least, only one set of them I'll tell you what I'll toss you whether we go to Nice or Cannes.

LEONARD Right *(He takes out a coin and tosses)*

NICHOLAS. Tails

LEONARD *(uncovering the coin)* Heads Do you mind coming to Cannes ?

NICHOLAS Just as soon, really When shall we go ? To-morrow ?

LEONARD Mightn't get a chance to-morrow. Why not to-night ? It seems a pity to waste the opportunity

NICHOLAS. You mean while Eustasia's dressing ?

LEONARD The—er—opportunity Sleep the night at Dover and cross to-morrow morning

NICHOLAS She'll be after us

LEONARD Nonsense.

NICHOLAS My dear man, you don't know Eustasia

LEONARD. I don't know Eustasia ? Well !

NICHOLAS *(with conviction)* She'll be after you like a bird.

You've never seen Eustasia when she has got somebody ill to look after

LEONARD I've never seen Eustasia ? Well !

NICHOLAS My dear chap, you've only had three days of her , I've had six Lord ! Look here We shall have to——

Enter LATIMER

LATIMER What, Leonard, all alone ?

NICHOLAS I say, you're the very man we want

LEONARD (*frowning*——) S'sh

LATIMER Leonard, don't "s'sh" Nicholas when he wants to speak to me

NICHOLAS (*to* LEONARD) It's all right, old chap, Latimer is a sportsman

LATIMER (*to* LEONARD) There ! You see the sort of reputation I have in the West End (*To* NICHOLAS) What is it you want to do ? Run away ?

LEONARD Well——er——

NICHOLAS I say, however did you guess ?

LATIMER Leonard's car has had steam up for the last twenty-four hours, waiting for a word from its owner

LEONARD (*seeing the south of France*) By Jove !

LATIMER And you are going with him, Nicholas ?

NICHOLAS Yes Thought I might as well be getting on Very grateful and all that but can't stay here for ever

LATIMER (*wondering what has happened between* NICHOLAS and ANNE) So you are going too ! I thought——Well ! Nicholas is going too

LEONARD I say, you do understand—I mean about——er——I mean, when I'm quite well again——start afresh and all that Cosset *her* a bit But when you're ill——or supposed to be ill—— Well, I mean, ask Nicholas

NICHOLAS Oh, rather

LATIMER My dear Leonard, why these explanations ? Who am I to interfere in other people's matrimonial affairs ? You and Nicholas are going away——good-bye (*He holds out his hand*)

NICHOLAS Yes, but what about Eustasia ? She's not going to miss the chance of cossetting Leonard just when she is getting into it She'll be after him like a bird

LATIMER . I see So you want me to keep her here ?

NICHOLAS That's the idea, if you could

LATIMER How can I keep her here if she doesn't want to stay?

LEONARD Well, how do you keep *anybody* here?

LATIMER Really, Leonard, I am surprised at you. By the charm of my old-world courtesy and hospitality, of course

LEONARD Oh! Well, I doubt if that keeps Eustasia

LATIMER (*shaking his head sadly*) I am afraid that that is only too true. In fact, the more I think of it, the more I realise that there is only one thing which will keep this devoted wife from her afflicted and suffering husband

LEONARD and NICHOLAS What?

DOMINIC *comes in*

LATIMER His lordship and Mr Nicholas are leaving at once. His lordship's car will wait for them outside the gates. See that a bag is packed for them

DOMINIC Yes, sir

LATIMER And come back when you've seen about that

DOMINIC Yes, sir [*He goes out*]

LATIMER The car can return for the rest of your luggage, and take it over in the morning

NICHOLAS Good!

LEONARD Er—thanks very much (*Anxiously*) What were you going to say about the only way of—er—

LATIMER The only way of keeping this devoted wife from her afflicted and suffering husband?

LEONARD (*gruffly*) Yes. What is it?

LATIMER Somebody else must have a temperature. Somebody else must be ill. Eustasia must have somebody else to cosset

NICHOLAS I say, how awfully sporting of you!

LATIMER Sporting?

NICHOLAS To sacrifice yourself like that

LATIMER I? You don't think *I* am going to sacrifice myself, do you? No, no, it's Dominic

DOMINIC (*coming in*) Yes, sir

LATIMER Dominic, are you ever ill?

DOMINIC Never, sir, barring a slight shortness of the breath

LATIMER (*to the others*) That's awkward I don't think you can cosset a shortness of the breath

NICHOLAS (*to DOMINIC*) I say, you could pretend to be ill, couldn't you ?

DOMINIC With what object, sir ?

NICHOLAS Well—er——

LATIMER Her ladyship is training to be a nurse She has already cured two very obstinate cases of nasal catarrh, accompanied by debility and a fluctuating temperature If she brings one more case off successfully, she earns the diploma and the gold medal of the Royal Therapeutical Society

NICHOLAS That's right

DOMINIC And you would wish me to be that third case, sir ?

NICHOLAS That's the idea

DOMINIC And be cosseted back to health by her ladyship ?

LATIMER Such would be your inestimable privilege

DOMINIC I am sorry, sir I must beg respectfully to decline

NICHOLAS I say, be a sport

LEONARD (*awkwardly*) Of course we should—Naturally you would not—er—lose anything by—er——

LATIMER His lordship wishes to imply that not only would your mental horizon be widened during the period of convalescence, but that material blessings would also flow Isn't that right, Leonard ?

NICHOLAS A commission on the gold medal Naturally

DOMINIC I am sorry, sir I am afraid I cannot see my way

NICHOLAS I say——

LATIMER Thank you, Dominic

DOMINIC Thank you, sir [He goes out

NICHOLAS Well, that's torn it (*To LATIMER*) If you're quite sure that you wouldn't like to have a go ? It's the chance of a lifetime to learn all about the French Revolution

LATIMER Well, well ! Something must be done. (*He smiles suddenly*) After all, why not ?

LEONARD (*eagerly*) You will ?

LATIMER I will

NICHOLAS I say——

LATIMER (*waving them off*) No, no Don't wait Fly

LEONARD Yes, we'd better be moving Come on !

NICHOLAS (*with a grin, as he goes*) There's an awfully good bit in the second chapter——

LATIMER (*holding up a finger*) Listen ! I hear her coming

LEONARD Good Lord !

(*They fly*)

LATIMER, *left alone, gives himself up to thought*
What illness shall he have ? He rings one of his
many bells, and DOMINIC comes in)

LATIMER Oh, Dominic In consequence of your obstinate good-health, I am going to sacrifice myself—I mean, I myself am going to embrace this great opportunity of mental and spiritual development

DOMINIC Yes, sir Very good of you, I'm sure, sir

LATIMER What sort of illness would you recommend ?

DOMINIC How about a nice sprained ankle, sir ?

LATIMER You think that would go well ?

DOMINIC It would avoid any interference with the customary habits at meal-time, sir There's a sort of monotony about bread-and-milk, no inspiration about it, sir, whether treated as a beverage or as a comestible

LATIMER I hadn't thought about bread-and-milk

DOMINIC You'll find that you will have little else to think about, sir, if you attempt anything stomachic Of course you could have the usual nasty cold, sir

LATIMER No, no, not that Let us be original

DOMINIC How about Xerostomia, sir ? Spelt with an x

LATIMER Is that good ?

DOMINIC Joseph tells me that his father has had it for a long time

LATIMER Oh ! Then perhaps we oughtn't to deprive him of it

DOMINIC I looked it up in the dictionary one Sunday afternoon, sir They describe it there as "an abnormal dryness of the mouth"

LATIMER I said I wanted to be original, Dominic

DOMINIC Quite so, sir

(*They both think in silence*)

LATIMER Perhaps I had better leave it to the inspiration of the moment

EUSTASIA (*off*) Dominic ! Dominic !

DOMINIC This appears to be the moment, sir

LATIMER Quick (*Bustling him off*) Don't let her ladyship come in for a moment I must assume a recumbent position

DOMINIC Yes, sir

[*He goes out*]

(LATIMER *lies down at full length on the sofa and begins to groan, putting a hand first on his stomach, then on his head, then on his elbow*

EUSTASIA *does not come* He cautiously raises his head, the room is empty)

LATIMER (*disappointedly*) Throwing it away ! (*He hears footsteps, and settles down again*)

(ANNE *comes in, hat on, bag in hand* She is just at the door when a groan reaches her She stops Another groan comes She puts down her bag and comes towards the sofa with an "Oh !" of anxiety)

LATIMER. Oh, my poor—ei—head ! (*He clasps it*)

ANNE (*alarmed*) What is it ? (*She kneels by him*)

LATIMER Oh, my—— (*Cheerfully*) Hallo, Anne, is it you ? (*He sits up*)

ANNE (*still anxious*) Yes, what is it ?

LATIMER (*bravely*) Oh, nothing, nothing A touch of neuralgia

ANNE Oh ! You frightened me

LATIMER Did I, Anne ? I'm sorry

ANNE You were groaning so I thought—I didn't know what had happened (*Sympathetically*) Is it very bad ?

LATIMER Not so bad as it sounded

ANNE (*taking off her gloves*) I know how bad it can be Father has it sometimes Then I have to send it away (*She has her gloves off now*) May I try ?

LATIMER (*remorsefully*) Anne !

(*She leans over from the back of him and begins to stroke his forehead with the tips of her fingers*
He looks up at her)

ANNE Close your eyes

LATIMER Ah, but I don't want to now

(*She laughs without embarrassment*)

ANNE It will go soon

LATIMER Not too soon

ANNE (*laughing suddenly*) Aren't faces funny when they're upside down?

LATIMER You have the absurdest little upside-down face that ever I saw, Anne

ANNE (*happily*) Have I?

LATIMER Why do you wear a hat on your chin? (*She laughs*) Why do you wear a hat?

ANNE I was going away

LATIMER Without saying good-bye?

ANNE (*ashamed*) I—I think so

LATIMER Oh, Anne!

ANNE (*hastily*) I should have written

LATIMER A post-card!

ANNE A letter

LATIMER With many thanks for your kind hospitality, yours sincerely

ANNE Yours *very* sincerely

LATIMER P S—I shall never see you again

ANNE P S—I shall never forget

LATIMER Ah, but you *must* forget

ANNE (*after a pause*) Is it better?

LATIMER (*lazily*) It is just the same It will always be the same It is unthinkable that anything different should ever happen In a hundred years' time we shall still be like this You will be a little tired, perhaps, your fingers will ache, but I shall be lying here, quite, quite happy

ANNE You shall have another minute—no more

LATIMER Then I shall go straight to the chemist and ask for three pennyworth of Anne's fingers (*They are silent for a little Then she stops and listens*) What is it?

ANNE I heard something Whispers

LATIMER Don't look round

(LEONARD and NICHOLAS, in hats and coats, creep cautiously in Very noiselessly, fingers to lips, they open the front door and creep out)

ANNE What was it? Was it—

LATIMER An episode in your life Over, buried, forgotten . .

ANNE (*pleadingly*) It never really happened, did it ?

LATIMER Of course not ! We must have read about it somewhere—or was it in a play ?

ANNE (*eagerly*) That was it ! We were in a box together

LATIMER Munching chocolates (*With a sigh*) What a child she was—that girl in the play—with her little, funny, grown-up airs !

(DOMINIC *comes in, and stops suddenly on seeing them*)

DOMINIC Oh, I beg your pardon, sir.

LATIMER Go on, Anne (*Happily*) I am having neuralgia, Dominic

DOMINIC Yes, sir A stubborn complaint, as I have heard sir

LATIMER Miss Anne is making me well What did you want ?

DOMINIC Her ladyship says will you please excuse her if she is not down to-night

LATIMER (*to ANNE*) Shall we excuse her if she is not down to-night ?

DOMINIC The fact is, sir, that Joseph is taken ill suddenly, and——

LATIMER (*to himself*) I never thought of Joseph !

ANNE Oh, poor Joseph ! What is it ?

DOMINIC A trifling affection of the throat, but necessitating careful attention, her ladyship says

LATIMER Please tell her ladyship how very much I thank her for looking after Joseph and tell Joseph how very sorry I am for him

DOMINIC: Yes, sir [*He goes out*]

LATIMER. You can't go now, Anne You will have to stay and chaperone Eustasia and me (*She laughs and shakes her head*) Must you go ?

ANNE Yes

LATIMER Back to your father ?

ANNE Yes (*He looks at her She is so very pretty, so brave*)

LATIMER (*it must be somebody else speaking—he hardly recognises the voice*) Let us say good-bye now There is a magic in your fingers which goes to my head, and makes me think ridiculous things Let us say good-bye now

ANNE (*taking his hand*) Good-bye ! (*Impulsively*) I wish you had been my father

(*Then she goes out And she has won, after all For MR LATIMER stands there dumb, wondering what has happened He walks across to a mirror to have a look at himself While he is there, DOMINIC comes in to superintend laying the table*)

LATIMER (*at the mirror*) Dominic, how old would you say I was ?

DOMINIC More than that, sir

LATIMER (*with a sigh*) Yes, I'm afraid I am And yet I look very young Sometimes I think I look too young

DOMINIC Yes, sir

LATIMER Miss Ann has just asked me to be her father

DOMINIC Very considerate of her, I'm sure, sir

LATIMER Yes To prevent similar mistakes in the future, I think I shall wear a long white beard

DOMINIC Yes, sir Shall I order one from the Stores ?

LATIMER Please

DOMINIC Thank you, sir Is Miss Anne leaving us, sir ?

LATIMER Yes . Don't overdo the length, Dominic, and I like the crim'ly sort

DOMINIC . Yes, sir . One of our most successful weeks on the whole, if I may say so, sir

LATIMER (*thoughtfully*) . Yes Well, well, we must all do what we can, Dominic

DOMINIC . That's the only way, isn't it, sir ?

(*They stand looking at each other Just for a moment DOMINIC is off duty That grave face relaxes , the eyes crease into a smile. MR LATIMER smiles back . . Very gently they begin to laugh together , old friends , master and servant no longer. " Dear, dear ! These children ! " says DOMINIC's laugh " How very amusing they are, to be sure ! " LATIMER's laugh is a little rueful, a moment ago he, too, was almost a child Yet he laughs. " Good old DOMINIC ! "*)

Suddenly the front-door bell rings. Instinctively they stiffen to attention. They are on duty again. They turn and march off, almost, as it were, saluting each other, MR LATIMER to his quarters, DOMINIC to his bolts and bars. He draws the curtains and opens the big front door.)

A MANLY VOICE Oh, is this—er—an hotel?

DOMINIC A sort of hotel, your Grace

HIS GRACE (*coming in, a lady on his arm*) My chauffeur said—we've had an accident—been delayed on the way—he said that——

(*Evidently another romantic couple. Let us leave them to MR LATIMER.*)

MR. PIM PASSES BY
A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

IMPORTANT

*No performance of this play may be given
unless written permission has been obtained
from*

Messrs Samuel French, Ltd ,
26 Southampton Street, Strand,
London, W C 2

CHARACTERS

GEORGE MARDEN, J P
OLIVIA (*his wife*)
DINAH (*his niece*)
LADY MARDEN (*his aunt*)
BRIAN STRANGE
CARRAWAY PIM
ANNE

THE first performance of this play in London took place at the New Theatre on January 5, 1920, with the following cast :

George Marden
Olivia —
Dinah —
Lady Marden
Brian Strange
Carraway Pim
Anne — —

BLN WEBSTER
IRENE VANBRUGH
GEORGETTE COHAN
ETHEL GRIFFIES
LESLIE HOWARD
DION BOUCICAULT
ETHEL WELLESLEY

MR. PIM PASSES BY

ACT I

The morning-room at Marden House (Buckinghamshire) decided more than a hundred years ago that it was all right, and has not bothered about itself since. Visitors to the house have called the result such different adjectives as "mellow," "old-fashioned," "charming"—even "baronial" and "antique", but nobody ever said it was "exciting". Sometimes OLIVIA wants it to be more exciting, and last week she let herself go over some new curtains. At present they are folded up and waiting for her, she still has the rings to put on. It is obvious that the curtains alone will overdo the excitement, they will have to be harmonised with a new carpet and cushions. OLIVIA has her eye on just the things, but one has to go carefully with GEORGE. What was good enough for his great-great-grandfather is good enough for him. However, we can trust OLIVIA to see him through it, although it may take time.

There are two ways of coming into the room, by the open windows leading from the terrace or by the door. On this pleasant July morning MR. PIM chooses the latter way—or rather ANNE chooses it for him, and old MR. PIM, wistful, kindly, gentle, little MR. PIM, living in some world of his own whither we cannot follow, ambles after her.

ANNE I'll tell Mr. Marden you're here, sir. Mr. Pim, isn't it?

PIM (*coming back to this world*) Yes—er—Mr. Carraway
Pim He doesn't know me, you understand, but if he

could just see me for a moment —er— (He fumbles in his pockets) I gave you that letter?

ANNE Yes, sir, I'll give it to him

PIM (*bringing out a letter which is not the one he was looking for, but which reminds him of something else he has forgotten*) Dear me!

ANNE Yes, sir?

PIM I ought to have sent a telegram, but I can do it on my way back You have a telegraph office in the village?

ANNE Oh yes, sir If you turn to the left when you get outside the gates, it isn't more than a hundred yards down the hill

PIM Thank you, thank you Very stupid of me to have forgotten

[ANNE goes out

(MR. PIM wanders about the room humming to himself, and looking vaguely at the pictures He has his back to the door as DINAH comes in She is nineteen, very pretty, very happy, and full of boyish high spirits and conversation)

DINAH Hullo!

PIM (*turning round*) Ah, good morning, Mrs Marden You must forgive me—er—

DINAH Oh I say, I'm not Mrs Marden I'm Dinah.

PIM (*with a bow*) Then I will say, Good morning, Miss Diana.

DINAH (*reproachfully*) Now, look here, if you and I are going to be friends you mustn't do that Dinah, not Diana Do remember it, there's a good man, because I get so tired of correcting people Have you come to stay with us?

PIM. Well no, Miss—er—Dinah

DINAH (*nodding*) That's right I can see I shan't have to speak to you again Now tell me your name and I bet you I get it right first time And do sit down

PIM (*sitting down*) Thank you. My name is—er—Pim, Carraway Pim—

DINAH Pim, that's easy.

PIM And I have a letter of introduction to your father—

DINAH: Oh no, now you're going wrong again, Mr

PIM George isn't my father, he's my uncle *Uncle* George—he doesn't like me calling him George. Olivia doesn't mind—I mean she doesn't mind being called Olivia, but George is rather touchy. You see, he's been my guardian since I was about two, and then about five years ago he married a widow called Mrs Telworthy—that's Olivia—so she became my Aunt Olivia, only she lets me drop the Aunt. Got that?

PIM (*a little alarmed*) I—I think so, Miss Marden.

DINAH (*admiringly*) I say, you *are* quick, Mr Pim. Well, if you take my advice, when you've finished your business with George, you will hang about a bit and see if you can't see Olivia. She's simply devastating. I don't wonder George fell in love with her.

PIM. It's only the merest matter of business—just a few minutes with your uncle—I'm afraid I shall hardly---

DINAH Well, you must please yourself. Mr Pim, I'm just giving you a friendly word of advice. Naturally, I was awfully glad to get such a magnificent aunt, because of course, marriage is rather a toss up, isn't it, and George might have gone off with anybody. It's different on the stage, where guardians always marry their wards, but George couldn't marry *me* because I'm his niece. Mind you, I don't say that I should have had him, because between ourselves he's a little bit old-fashioned.

PIM So he married—er—Mrs Marden instead.

DINAH Mrs Telworthy—don't say you've forgotten already, just when you were getting so good at names. Mrs Telworthy. You see, Olivia married the Telworthy man and went to Australia with him, and he drank himself to death in the bush, or wherever you drink yourself to death out there, and Olivia came home to England, and met my uncle, and he fell in love with her and proposed to her, and he came into my room that night—I was about fourteen—and turned on the light and said, "Dinah, how would you like to have a beautiful aunt of your very own?" And I said "Congratulations, George." That was the first time I called him George. Of course, I'd seen it coming for *weeks*. Telworthy, isn't it a funny name?

PIM Very singular. From Australia, you say?

DINAH Yes, I always say that he's probably still alive, and will turn up here one morning and annoy George, because that's what first husbands always do in books, but I'm afraid there's not much chance

PIM (*shocked*) Miss Marden!

DINAH Well, of course, I don't really *want* it to happen, but it *would* be rather exciting, wouldn't it? However, things like that never seem to occur down here, somehow. There was a hay-rick burnt last year about a mile away, but that isn't quite the same thing, is it?

PIM No, I should say that that was certainly different

DINAH Of course, something very, very wonderful did happen last night, but I'm not sure if I know you well enough— (*She looks at him hesitatingly*)

PIM (*uncomfortably*). Really, Miss Marden, I am only a—*a passer-by*, here to-day and gone to-morrow. You really mustn't—

DINAH And yet there's something about you, Mr Pim, which inspires confidence. The fact is—(*in a stage whisper*)—I got engaged last night!

PIM Dear me, let me congratulate you

DINAH I expect that's why George is keeping you such a long time. Brian, my young man, the well-known painter—only nobody has ever heard of him—he's smoking a pipe with George in the library and asking for his niece's hand. Isn't it exciting? You're really rather lucky, Mr Pim—I mean being told so soon. Even Olivia doesn't know yet

PIM (*getting up*) Yes, yes. I congratulate you, Miss Marden. Perhaps it would be better—

[ANNE comes in]

ANNE Mr Marden is out at the moment, sir—Oh, I didn't see you, Miss Dinah

DINAH It's all right, Anne. I'm looking after Mr Pim

ANNE Yes, Miss

[*She goes out*]

DINAH (*excitedly*) That's me. They can't discuss me in the library without breaking down, so they're walking up and down outside, and slashing at the thistles in order to conceal their emotion. You know. I expect Brian—

PIM (*looking at his watch*) Yes, I think, Miss Marden, I

had better go now and return a little later. I have a telegram which I want to send, and perhaps by the time I come back——

DINAH Oh, but how disappointing of you, when we were getting on together so nicely. And it was just going to be your turn to tell me all about *yourself*.

PIM. I have really nothing to tell, Miss Marden. I have a letter of introduction to Mr. Marden, who in turn will give me, I hope, a letter to a certain distinguished man whom it is necessary for me to meet. That is all. (*Holding out his hand*) And now, Miss Marden——

DINAH Oh, I'll start you on your way to the post office. I want to know if you're married, and all that sort of thing. You've got heaps to tell me, Mr. Pim. Have you got your hat? That's right. Then we'll — hullo, here's Brian.

(BRIAN STRANGE *comes in at the windows*. *He is what GEORGE calls a damned futuristic painter-chap, aged twenty-four. To look at, he is a very pleasant boy, rather untidily dressed*.)

BRIAN (*nodding*) How do you do?

DINAH (*seizing him*) Brian, this is Mr. Pim. Mr. Carraway Pim. He's been telling me all about himself. It's so interesting. He's just going to send a telegram, and then he's coming back again. Mr. Pim, this is Brian — you know.

BRIAN (*smiling and shaking hands*) How do you do?

DINAH (*pleadingly*) You won't mind going to the post office by yourself, will you, because, you see, Brian and I — (*she looks lovingly at BRIAN*)

PIM (*because they are so young*) Miss Dinah and Mr. — er — Brian, I have only come into your lives for a moment, and it is probable that I shall now pass out of them for ever, but you will allow an old man——

DINAH Oh, not old!

PIM (*chuckling happily*) Well, a middle-aged man — to wish you both every happiness in the years that you have before you. Good-bye, good-bye.

[*He disappears gently through the windows*]

DINAH Brian, he'll get lost if he goes that way.

BRIAN (*going to the windows and calling after him*) Round

to the left, sir That's right (*He comes back into the room*) Rum old bird Who is he ?

DINAH Darling, you haven't kissed me yet

BRIAN (*taking her in his arms*) I oughtn't to, but then one never ought to do the nice things

DINAH Why oughtn't you ?

(*They sit on the sofa together*)

BRIAN Well, we said we'd be good until we'd told your uncle and aunt all about it You see, being a guest in their house——

DINAH But, darling child, ~~what~~ *what* have you been doing all this morning *except* telling George ?

BRIAN Trying to tell George

DINAH (*nodding*) Yes, of course, there's a difference

BRIAN I think he guessed there was something up, and he took me down to see the pigs—he said he had to see the pigs at once—I don't know why, an appointment perhaps, And we talked about pigs all the way, and I couldn't say, "Talking about pigs, I want to marry your niece——"

DINAH (*with mock indignation*) Of course you couldn't

BRIAN No Well, you see how it was And then when, we'd finished talking about pigs, we started talking to the pigs——

DINAH (*eagerly*) Oh, *how* is Arnold ?

BRIAN The little black-and-white one ? He's very jolly, I believe, but naturally I wasn't thinking about him much I was wondering how to begin And then Lumsden came up, and wanted to talk pig-food, and the atmosphere grew less and less romantic, and—and I gradually drifted away

DINAH Poor darling Well, we shall have to approach him through Olivia.

BRIAN But I always wanted to tell her first, she's so much easier Only you wouldn't let me

DINAH That's *your* fault, Brian You would tell Olivia that she ought to have orange-and-black curtains

BRIAN But she *wants* orange-and-black curtains

DINAH Yes, but George says he's not going to have any futuristic nonsense in an honest English country house, which has been good enough for his father and his grandfather and his great-grandfather, and—and all the rest of them. So there's a sort of strained feeling between Olivia

and George just now, and if Olivia were to—sort of recommend you, well, it wouldn't do you much good.

BRIAN (*looking at her*): I see. Of course I know what you want, Dinah.

DINAH: What do I want?

BRIAN: You want a secret engagement, and notes left under door-mats, and meetings by the withered thorn, when all the household is asleep. I know you.

DINAH: Oh, but it is such fun! I love meeting people by withered thorns.

BRIAN: Well, I'm not going to have it.

DINAH (*childishly*): Oh, George! Look at us being husbandy!

BRIAN: You babe! I adore you. (*He kisses her and holds her away from him and looks at her*) You know, you're rather throwing yourself away on me. Do you mind?

DINAH: Not a bit.

BRIAN: We shall never be rich, but we shall have lots of fun, and meet interesting people, and feel that we're doing something worth doing, and not getting paid nearly enough for it, and we can curse the Academy together and the British Public, and—oh, it's an exciting life.

DINAH (*seeing it*): I shall love it.

BRIAN: I'll make you love it. You shan't be sorry, Dinah.

DINAH: You shan't be sorry either, Brian.

BRIAN (*looking at her lovingly*): Oh, I know I shan't. . . What will Olivia think about it? Will she be surprised?

DINAH: She's never surprised. She always seems to have thought of things about a week before they happen. George just begins to get hold of them about a week after they've happened. (*Considering him*) After all, there's no reason why George *shouldn't* like you, darling.

BRIAN: I'm not his sort, you know.

DINAH: You're more Olivia's sort. Well, we'll tell Olivia this morning.

OLIVIA (*coming in*): And what are you going to tell Olivia this morning? (*She looks at them with a smile*) Oh, well, I think I can guess.

Shall we describe OLIVIA? *But you will know all about her before the day is over.*

DINAH (*jumping up*) Olivia, darling!

BRIAN (*following*) Say you understand, Mrs Marden

OLIVIA Mrs Marden, I am afraid, is a very dense person, Brian, but I think if you asked Olivia if she understood—

BRIAN Bless you, Olivia I knew you'd be on our side

DINAH Of course she would

OLIVIA I don't know if it's usual to kiss an aunt-in-law, Brian, but Dinah is such a very special sort of niece that—
(*she inclines her cheek and BRIAN kisses it*)

DINAH I say, you *are* in luck to-day, Brian

OLIVIA (*going over to her chair by the work-table and getting to business with the curtains*) And how many people have been told the good news?

BRIAN Nobody, yet

DINAH Except Mr Pim

BRIAN Oh, does *he*—

OLIVIA Who's Mr Pim?

DINAH Oh, he just happened—I say, are those *the* curtains? Then you're going to have them after all?

OLIVIA (*with an air of surprise*) After all what? But I decided on them long ago (*To BRIAN*) You haven't told George yet?

BRIAN I began to, you know, but I never got any farther than "Er—there's just—er——"

DINAH George *would* talk about pigs all the time

OLIVIA Well, I suppose you want me to help you

DINAH Do, darling

BRIAN It would be awfully decent of you. Of course, I'm not quite his sort really——

DINAH You're *my* sort

BRIAN But I don't think he objects to me, and——

(*GEORGE comes in, a typical, narrow-minded, honest country gentleman of forty odd*)

GEORGE (*at the windows*) What's all this about a Mr Pim? (*He kicks some of the mud off his boots*) Who is he? Where is he? I had most important business with Lumsden, and the girl comes down and cackles about a Mr Pim, or Ping, or something Where did I put his card? (*Bringing it out*) Carraway Pim Never heard of him in my life

DINAH He said he had a letter of introduction, Uncle George

GEORGE Oh you saw him, did you ? Yes, that reminds me, there *was* a letter—*(he brings it out and reads it)*

DINAH He had to send a telegram He's coming back

OLIVIA Pass me those scissors, Brian

BRIAN These ? *(He picks them up and comes close to her)*

OLIVIA Thank you *(She indicates GEORGE'S back 'Now ?' says BRIAN with his eyebrows She nods)*

GEORGE *(reading)* Ah well, a friend of Brymer's Glad to oblige him Yes, I know the man he wants Coming back, you say, Dinah ? Then I'll be going back Send him down to the farm, Olivia, when he comes *(To BRIAN)* Hallo, what happened to *you* ?

OLIVIA Don't go, George, there's something we want to talk about

GEORGE Hallo, what's this ?

BRIAN *(to OLIVIA)* Sha! I——

OLIVIA Yes

BRIAN *(stepping out)* I've been wanting to tell you all this morning, sir, only I didn't seem to have an opportunity of getting it out

GEORGE Well, what is it ?

BRIAN I want to marry Dinah, sir

GEORGE You want to marry Dinah ? God bless my soul !

DINAH *(rushing to him and putting her cheek against his coat)* Oh, do say you like the idea, Uncle George

GEORGE Like the idea ! Have you heard of this nonsense Olivia ?

OLIVIA They've just this moment told me, George I think they would be happy together

GEORGE *(to BRIAN)* And what do you propose to be happy together *on* ?

BRIAN Well, of course, it doesn't amount to much at present, but we shan't starve

DINAH Brian got fifty pounds for a picture last March !

GEORGE *(a little upset by this)* Oh ! *(Recovering gamely)* And how many pictures have you sold since ?

BRIAN Well, none, but——

GEORGE None ! And I don't wonder Who the 'devil

is going to buy pictures with triangular clouds and square sheep? And they call that Art nowadays! Good God, man (*waving him to the windows*) go outside and *look* at the clouds!

OLIVIA If he draws round clouds in future, George, will you let him marry Dinah?

GEORGE What—what? Yes, of course, you *would* be on his side—all this Futuristic nonsense. I'm just taking these clouds as an example. I suppose I can see as well as any man in the county, and I say that clouds *aren't* triangular.

BRIAN After all, sir, at my age one is naturally experimenting, and trying to find one's (*with a laugh*)—well, it sounds priggish, but one's medium of expression. I shall find out what I want to do directly, but I think I shall always be able to earn enough to live on. Well, I have for the last three years.

GEORGE I see, and now you want to experiment with a wife, and you propose to start experimenting with *my* niece?

BRIAN (*with a shrug*) Well, of course, if you—

OLIVIA You could help the experiment, darling, by giving Dinah a good allowance until she's twenty-one.

GEORGE Help the experiment! I don't *want* to help the experiment.

OLIVIA (*apologetically*) Oh, I thought you did.

GEORGE You will talk as if I was made of money. What with taxes always going up and rents always going down, it's as much as we can do to rub along as we are, without making allowances to everybody who thinks she wants to get married. (*To BRIAN*) And that's thanks to you, my friend.

BRIAN (*surprised*) To me?

OLIVIA You never told me, darling. What's Brian been doing?

DINAH (*indignantly*) He hasn't been doing anything.

GEORGE He's one of your Socialists who go turning the country upside down.

OLIVIA But even Socialists must get married sometimes.

GEORGE I don't see any necessity.

OLIVIA But you'd have nobody to damn after dinner, darling, if they all died out.

BRIAN Really, sir, I don't see what my politics and my art have got to do with it I'm perfectly ready not to talk about either when I'm in your house, and as Dinah doesn't seem to object to them——

DINAH I should think she doesn't

GEORGE Oh, you can get round the women, I daresay

BRIAN Well, it's Dinah I want to marry and live with So what it really comes to is that you don't think I can support a wife

GEORGE Well, if you re going to do it by selling pictures, I don't think you can

BRIAN All right, tell me how much you want me to earn in a year, and I'll earn it

GEORGE (*hedging*) It isn't merely a question of money I just mention that as one thing—one of the important things In addition to that, I think you are both too young to marry I don't think you know your own minds, and I am not at all persuaded that, with what I venture to call your outrageous tastes, you and my niece will live happily together Just because she thinks she loves you, Dinah may persuade herself now that she agrees with all you say and do, but she has been properly brought up in an honest English country household, and—er—she—well, in short I cannot at all approve of any engagement between you (*Getting up*) Olivia, if this Mr —er—Pim comes, I shall be down at the farm You might send him along to me

(*He walks towards the windows*)

BRIAN (*indignantly*) Is there any reason why I shouldn't marry a girl who has been properly brought up?

GEORGE I think you know my views, Strange

OLIVIA George, wait a moment, dear We can't quite leave it like this

GEORGE I have said all I want to say on the subject

OLIVIA Yes, darling, but I haven't begun to say all that I want to say on the subject

GEORGE Of course, if you have anything to say, Olivia, I will listen to it, but I don't know that this is quite the time, or that you have chosen—(*looking darkly at the curtains*)—quite the occupation likely to—er—endear your views to me

DINAH (*mutinously*) I may as well tell you, Uncle George that I have got a good deal to say, too.

OLIVIA I can guess what you are going to say, Dinah, and I think you had better keep it for the moment

DINAH (*meekly*) Yes, Aunt Olivia

OLIVIA Brian, you might take her outside for a walk I expect you have plenty to talk about

GEORGE Now mind, Strange, no love-making I put you on your honour about that

BRIAN I'll do my best to avoid it, sir

DINAH (*cheekily*) May I take his arm if we go up a hill?

OLIVIA I'm sure you'll know how to behave—both of you

BRIAN Come on, then, Dinah

DINAH Righto.

GEORGE (*as they go*) And if you do see any clouds, Strange, take a good look at them (*He chuckles to himself*) Triangular clouds—I never heard of such nonsense (*He goes back to his chair at the writing-table*) Futuristic rubbish Well, Olivia?

OLIVIA Well, George?

GEORGE What are you doing?

OLIVIA Making curtains, George Won't they be rather sweet? Oh, but I forgot—you don't like them

GEORGE I don't like them, and what is more, I don't mean to have them in my house As I told you yesterday, this is the house of a simple country gentleman, and I don't want any of these new-fangled ideas in it

OLIVIA Is marrying for love a new-fangled idea?

GEORGE We'll come to that directly None of you women can keep to the point What I am saying now is that the house of my fathers and forefathers is good enough for me

OLIVIA Do you know, George, I can hear one of your ancestors saying that to his wife in their smelly old cave, when the new-fangled idea of building houses was first suggested "The Cave of my Fathers is——"

GEORGE That's ridiculous Naturally we must have progress But that's just the point (*Indicating the curtains*) I don't call this sort of thing progress It's—ah—retrogression

OLIVIA Well, anyhow, it's pretty

GEORGE There I disagree with you And I must say once more that I will not have them hanging in my house.

OLIVIA Very well, George (*But she goes on working*)

GEORGE That being so I don't see the necessity of going on with them

OLIVIA Well, I must do something with them now I've got the material I thought perhaps I could sell them when they're finished—as we're so poor

GEORGE What do you mean—so poor?

OLIVIA Well, you said just now that you couldn't give Dinah an allowance because rents had gone down

GEORGE (*annoyed*) Confound it, Olivia! Keep to the point! We'll talk about Dinah's affairs directly We're discussing our own affairs at the moment

OLIVIA But what is there to discuss?

GEORGE Those ridiculous things

OLIVIA But we've finished that You've said you wouldn't have them hanging in your house, and I've said, "Very well, George" Now we can go on to Dinah and Brian

GEORGE (*shouting*) But put these beastly things away

OLIVIA (*rising and gathering up the curtains*) Very well, George (*She puts them away, slowly, gracefully There is an uncomfortable silence Evidently somebody ought to apologise*)

GEORGE (*realising that he is the one*) Er—look here, Olivia, old girl, you've been a jolly good wife to me, and we don't often have rows, and if I've been rude to you about this—lost my temper a bit perhaps, what?—I'll say I'm sorry May I have a kiss?

OLIVIA (*holding up her face*) George, darling! (*He kisses her*) Do you love me?

GEORGE You know I do, old girl.

OLIVIA As much as Brian loves Dinah?

GEORGE (*stiffly*) I've said all I want to say about that (*He goes away from her*)

OLIVIA Oh, but there must be lots you want to say—and perhaps don't like to Do tell me, darling

GEORGE What it comes to is this I consider that Dinah is too young to choose a husband for herself and that Strange isn't the husband I should choose for her

OLIVIA You were calling him Brian yesterday.

GEORGE Yesterday I regarded him as a boy, now he wants me to look upon him as a man

OLIVIA He's twenty-four

GEORGE And Dinah's nineteen Ridiculous !

OLIVIA If he'd been a Conservative, and thought that clouds were round, I suppose he'd have seemed older, somehow

GEORGE That's a different point altogether That has nothing to do with his age

OLIVIA (*innocently*) Oh, I thought it had

GEORGE What I am objecting to is these ridiculously early marriages before either party knows its own mind, much less the mind of the other party Such marriages invariably lead to unhappiness

OLIVIA Of, course *my* first marriage wasn't a happy one

GEORGE As you know, Olivia, I dislike speaking about your first marriage at all, and I had no intention of bringing it up now, but since you mention it—well, that is a case in point

OLIVIA (*looking back at it*) When I was eighteen, I was in love Or perhaps I only thought I was, and I don't know if I should have been happy or not if I had married him But my father made me marry a man called Jacob Telworthy, and when things were too hot for him in England—"too hot for him"—I think that was the expression we used in those days—then we went to Australia, and I left him there, and the only happy moment I had in all my married life was on the morning when I saw in the papers that he was dead

GEORGE (*very uncomfortable*) Yes, yes, my dear, I know. You must have had a terrible time I can hardly bear to think about it My only hope is that I have made up to you for it in some degree But I don't see what bearing it has upon Dinah's case

OLIVIA Oh, none, except that *my* father *liked* Jacob's political opinions and his views on art I expect that that was why he chose him for me

GEORGE You seem to think that I wish to choose a husband for Dinah. I don't at all. Let her choose whom she likes as long as he can support her and there's a chance

of their being happy together Now, with regard to this fellow —

OLIVIA You mean Brian ?

GEORGE He's got no money, and he's been brought up in quite a different way from Dinah Dinah may be prepared to believe that—er—all cows are blue, and that—er—waves are square, but she won't go on believing it for ever

OLIVIA Neither will Brian

GEORGE Well, that's what I keep telling him, only he won't see it Just as I keep telling you about those ridiculous curtains It seems to me that I am the only person in the house with any eyesight left

OLIVIA Perhaps you are, darling, but you must let us find out our own mistakes for ourselves At any rate, Brian is a gentleman, he loves Dinah, Dinah loves him, he's earning enough to support himself, and you are earning enough to support Dinah I think it's worth risk.ing, George

GEORGE (*stiffly*) I can only say the whole question demands much more anxious thought than you seem to have given it You say that he is a gentleman He knows how to behave, I admit, but if his morals are as topsy-turvy as his tastes and—er—politics, as I've no doubt they are, then—er— In short, I do *not* approve of Brian Strange as a husband for my niece and ward

OLIVIA (*looking at him thoughtfully*) You *are* a curious mixture, George You were so very unconventional when you married me, and you're so very conventional when Brian wants to marry Dinah George Marden to marry the widow of a convict !

GEORGE Convict ! What do you mean ?

OLIVIA Jacob Telworthy, convict—I forget his number—surely I told you all this, dear, when we got engaged ?

GEORGE Never !

OLIVIA I told you how he carelessly put the wrong signature to a cheque for a thousand pounds in England, how he made a little mistake about two or three companies he'd promoted in Australia, and how—

GEORGE Yes, yes, but you never told me he was *convicted* !

OLIVIA What difference does it make ?

GEORGE My dear Olivia, if you can't see that—a convict !

OLIVIA So, you see, we needn't be too particular about our niece, need we ?

GEORGE I think we had better leave your first husband out of the conversation altogether I never wished to refer to him, I never wish to hear about him again I certainly had not realised that he was actually—er—*convicted* for his—er——

OLIVIA Mistakes

GEORGE Well, we needn't go into that As for this other matter, I don't for a moment take it seriously Dinah is an exceptionally pretty girl, and young Strange is a good-looking boy If they are attracted to each other, it is a mere outward attraction which I am convinced will not lead to any lasting happiness That must be regarded as my last word in the matter, Olivia If this Mr.—er—what was his name, comes, I shall be down at the farm

[He goes out by the door]

(Left alone, OLIVIA brings out her curtains again, and gets calmly to work upon them)

(DINAH and BRIAN come in by the windows)

DINAH Finished ?

OLIVIA Oh no, I've got all these rings to put on

DINAH I meant talking to George

BRIAN We walked about outside——

DINAH Until we heard him *not* talking to you any more——

BRIAN And we didn't kiss each other once.

DINAH Brian was very George-like He wouldn't even let me tickle the back of his neck *(She goes up suddenly to OLIVIA and kneels by her and kisses her)* Darling, being George-like is a very nice thing to be—I mean a nice thing for other people to be—I mean—oh, you know what I mean But say that he's going to be decent about it

OLIVIA Of course he is, Dinah

BRIAN You mean he'll let me come here as—as——

DINAH As my young man ?

OLIVIA Oh, I think so

DINAH Olivia, you're a wonder Have you really talked him round ?

OLIVIA I haven't said anything yet But I darsay I shall think of something

DINAH (*disappointedly*) Oh!

BRIAN (*making the best of it*) After all, Dinah, I'm going back to London to-morrow—

OLIVIA You can be good for one more day, Dinah, and then when Brian isn't here, we'll see what we can do

DINAH Yes, but I didn't want him to go back to-morrow

BRIAN (*sternly*) Must Haid work before me Earn thousands a year Paint the Mayor and Corporation of Pudsey, life-size, including chains of office, paint slice of haddock on plate Copy Landseer for old gentleman in Bayswater. Design antimacassar for middle-aged sofa in Streatham Earn a living for you, Dinah

DINAH (*giggling*) Oh, Brian, you're heavenly What fun we shall have when we're married

BRIAN (*stiffly*) Sir Brian Strange, R A., it you please, Miss Marden Sir Brian Strange, R A., writes "Your Sanogene has proved a most excellent tonic After completing the third acie of my Academy picture 'The Mayor and Corporation of Pudsey' I was completely exhausted, but one bottle of Sanogene revived me, and I finished the remaining seven acres at a single sitting"

OLIVIA (*looking about her*) Brian, find my scissors for me

BRIAN Scissors (*Looking for them*) Sir Brian Strange, R A., looks for scissors (*Finding them*) Aha! Once more we must record an unqualified success for the eminent Academician Your scissors

OLIVIA Thank you so much

DINAH Come on, Brian, let's go out I feel open-airy

OLIVIA Don't be late for lunch, there's good people Lady Marden is coming

DINAH Aunt Juli-ah! Help! (*She faints in BRIAN's arms*) That means a clean pinafore Brian, you'll jolly well have to brush your hair

BRIAN (*feeling it*) I suppose there's no time now to go up to London and get it cut?

Enter ANNE, followed by PIM

ANNE Mr Pim!

DINAH (*delighted*) Hullo, Mr. Pim! Here we are again! You can't get rid of us so easily, you see

PIM I—er—dear Miss Marden—

OLIVIA How do you do, Mr Pim? I can't get up but do come and sit down My husband will be here in a minute Anne, send somebody down to the farm—

ANNE I think I heard the Master in the library, madam

OLIVIA Oh, will you tell him then?

ANNE Yes, madam

[ANNE goes out]

OLIVIA You'll stay to lunch, of course, Mr Pim?

DINAH Oh, do!

PIM It's very kind of you, Miss Marden, but—

DINAH Oh, you simply must, Mr Pim You haven't told us half enough about yourself yet I want to hear all about your early life

OLIVIA Dinah!

PIM Oh, we are almost, I might say, old friends, Miss Marden

DINAH Of course we are He knows Brian, too There's more in Mr Pim than you think You *will* stay to lunch, won't you?

PIM It's very kind of you to ask me, Mrs Marden, but I am lunching with the Trevors

OLIVIA Oh, well, you must come to lunch another day

DINAH The reason why we like Mr Pim so much is that he was the first person to congratulate us We feel that he is going to have a great influence on our lives

PIM (to OLIVIA) I, so to speak, stumbled on the engagement this morning, and—er—

OLIVIA I see Children, you must go and tidy yourselves up Run along

BRIAN Sir Brian and Lady Strange never run, they walk (Offering his arm) Madam!

DINAH (taking it) Au revoir, Mr Pim (dramatically) We—shall—meet—again!

PIM (chuckling) Good morning, Miss Dinah

BRIAN Good morning.

[He and DINAH go out]

OLIVIA You must forgive them, Mr Pim They're such children And naturally they're rather excited just now

PIM Oh, not at all, Mrs Marden

OLIVIA Of course you won't say anything about their

engagement We only heard about it five minutes ago, and nothing has been settled yet

PIM Of course, of course !

Enter GEORGE

GEORGE Ah, Mr Pim, we meet at last Sorry to have kept you waiting before

PIM The apology should come from me, Mr. Marden for having—er——

GEORGE Not at all Very glad to meet you now Any friend of Brymer's You want a letter to this man Fanshawe ?

OLIVIA Shall I be in your way at all ?

PIM Oh, no, no, please don't

GEORGE It's only just a question of a letter (*Going to his desk*) Fanshawe will put you in the way of seeing all that you want to see He's a very old friend of mine (*Taking a sheet of notepaper*) You'll stay to lunch, of course ?

PIM I'm afraid I am lunching with the Trevors——

GEORGE Oh, well, they'll look after you all right Good chap, Trevor.

PIM (*to OLIVIA*) You see, Mrs Marden, I have only recently arrived from Australia after travelling about the world for some years, and I'm rather out of touch with my—er—fellow-workers in London

OLIVIA Oh yes You've been in Australia, Mr Pim ?

GEORGE (*disliking Australia*) I shan't be a moment, Mr Pim (*He frowns at OLIVIA*)

PIM Oh, that's all right, thank you (*To OLIVIA*) Oh yes, I have been in Australia more than once in the last few years

OLIVIA Really ? I used to live at Sydney many years ago Do you know Sydney at all ?

GEORGE (*detesting Sydney*) H'r'm ! Perhaps I'd better mention that you are a friend of the Trevors ?

PIM Thank you, thank you (*To OLIVIA*) Indeed yes, I spent several months in Sydney

OLIVIA How curious I wonder if we have any friends in common there.

GEORGE (*hastily*): Extremely unlikely, I should think Sydney is a very big place.

PIM True, but the world is a very small place, Mr

MARDEN I had a remarkable instance of that, coming over on the boat this last time

GEORGE Ah ! (*Feeling that the conversation is now safe, he resumes his letter*)

PIM Yes There was a man I used to employ in Sydney some years ago, a bad fellow, I'm afraid, Mrs Marden who had been in prison for some kind of fraudulent company-promoting and had taken to drink and—and so on

OLIVIA Yes, yes, I understand

PIM Drinking himself to death I should have said I gave him at the most another year to live Yet to my amazement the first person I saw as I stepped on board the boat that brought me to England last week was this fellow There was no mistaking him I spoke to him, in fact, we recognised each other

OLIVIA Really ?

PIM He was travelling steerage, we didn't meet again on board, and as it happened at Marseilles, this poor fellow—er—now what was his name ? A very unusual one Began with a—a T, I think

OLIVIA (*with suppressed feeling*) Yes, Mr Pim, yes ? (*She puts out a hand to GEORGE*)

GEORGE (*in an undertone*) Nonsense, dear !

PIM (*triumphantly*) I've got it ! Telworthy !

OLIVIA Telworthy !

GEORGE Good God !

PIM (*a little surprised at the success of his story*) An unusual name, is it not ? Not a name you could forget when once you had heard it

OLIVIA (*with feeling*) No, it is not a name you could forget when once you had heard it

GEORGE (*hastily coming over to PIM*) Quite so, Mr Pim, a most remarkable name, a most odd story altogether Well, well, here's your letter, and if you're sure you won't stay to lunch—

PIM I'm afraid not, thank you You see, I——

GEORGE The Trevors, yes I'll just see you on your way

(*To OLIVIA*) Er—my dear—

OLIVIA (*holding out her hand, but not looking at him*) Good-bye, Mr Pim

PIM Good-bye, good-bye !

GEORGE (*leading the way through the windows*) This way,
this way Quicker for you

PIM Thank you, thank you

[GEORGE hurries MR PIM out

(OLIVIA sits there and looks into the past Now and
then she shudders)

[George comes back

GEORGE Good God ! Telworthy ! Is it possible ?

(Before OLIVIA can answer, LADY MARDEN is
announced They pull themselves together and
greet her)

ACT II

Lunch is over and coffee has been served on the terrace. Conversation drags on, to the satisfaction of LADY MARDEN, but of nobody else. GEORGE and OLIVIA want to be alone, so do BRIAN and DINAH. At last BRIAN murmurs something about a cigarette-case; and, catching DINAH's eye, comes into the house. He leans against the sofa and waits for DINAH.

DINAH (*loudly as she comes in*) Have you found it?

BRIAN Found what?

DINAH (*in her ordinary voice*) That was just for *thee* benefit. I said I'd help you find it. It *is* your cigarette-case we're looking for, isn't it?

BRIAN (*taking it out*) Yes. Have one?

DINAH No, thank you, darling. Aunt Juli-ah still thinks it's unladylike. Have you ever seen her beagling?

BRIAN No. Is that very ladylike?

DINAH Very. . . I say, what has happened, do you think?

BRIAN Everything. I love you, and you love me.

DINAH Silly! I meant between George and Olivia. Didn't you notice them at lunch?

BRIAN I noticed that you seemed to be doing most of the talking. But then I've noticed that before sometimes. Do you think Olivia and your uncle have quarrelled because of *us*?

DINAH Of course not. George may *think* he has quarrelled, but I'm quite sure Olivia hasn't. No, I believe Mr Pim's at the bottom of it. He's brought some terribly sad news about George's investments. The old home will have to be sold up.

BRIAN Good Then your uncle won't mind your marrying me

DINAH Yes, darling, but you must be more dramatic about it than that "George," you must say, with tears in your eyes, "I cannot pay off the whole of the mortgage for you I have only two and ninepence, but at least let me take your niece off your hands" Then George will thump you on the back and say gruffly, "You're a good fellow, Brian, a damn good fellow," and he'll blow his nose very loudly, and say, "Confound this cigar, it won't draw properly" (*She gives us a rough impression of GEORGE doing it*)

BRIAN Dinah, you're a heavenly idiot And you've simply got to marry me, uncles or no uncles

DINAH It will have to be "uncles," I'm afraid, because, you see, I'm his ward, and I can get sent to Chancery or Coventry or somewhere beastly, if I marry wit out his consent Haven't *you* got anybody who objects to your marrying *me*?

BRIAN Nobody, thank Heaven

DINAH Well, that's rather disappointing of you I saw myself fascinating your aged father at the same time that you were fascinating George I should have done it much better than you As a George-fascinator you aren't very successful, sweetheart

BRIAN What am I like as a Dinah-fascinator?

DINAH Plus six, darling.

BRIAN Then I'll stick to that and leave George to Olivia.

DINAH I expect she'll manage him all right I have great faith in Olivia But you'll marry me, anyhow, won't you, Brian?

BRIAN I will

DINAH Even if we have to wait till I'm twenty-one?

BRIAN Even if we have to wait till you're fifty-one

DINAH (*holding out her hands to him*) Darling!

BRIAN (*uneasily*) I say, don't do that

DINAH. Why not?

BRIAN Well, I promised I wouldn't kiss you

DINAH. Oh! Well, you might just *send* me a kiss You can look the other way as if you didn't know I was here

BRIAN Like this ?

(He looks the other way, kisses the tips of his fingers, and flicks it carelessly in her direction)

DINAH That was a lovely one Now here's one coming for you

(He catches it gracefully and conveys it to his mouth)

BRIAN *(with a low bow)* Madam, I thank you

DINAH *(curtseying)* Your servant, Mr Strange

OLIVIA *(from outside)* Dinah !

DINAH *(jumping up)* Hullo !

(OLIVIA comes in through the windows, followed by GEORGE and LADY MARDEN, the latter a vigorous young woman of sixty odd, who always looks as if she were beagling)

OLIVIA Aunt Julia wants to see the pigs, dear I wish you'd take her down I'm rather tired, and your uncle has some business to attend to

LADY MARDEN I've always said that you don't take enough exercise, Olivia Look at me—sixty-five and proud of it

OLIVIA Yes, Aunt Julia, you're wonderful

DINAH How old would Olivia be if she took exercise ?

GEORGE Don't stand about asking silly questions, Dinah You aunt hasn't much time

BRIAN May I come, too, Lady Marden ?

LADY MARDEN Well, a little exercise wouldn't do you any harm, Mr Strange You're an artist, aren't you ?

BRIAN Well, I try to paint

DINAH He sold a picture last March for——

GEORGE Yes, yes, never mind that now

LADY MARDEN Unhealthy life Well, come along

[She strides out, followed by DINAH and BRIAN

(GEORGE sits down at his desk with his head in his hand, and stabs the blotting-paper with a pen OLIVIA takes the curtains with her to the sofa and begins to work on them)

GEORGE *(looking up and seeing them)* Really, Olivia, we've got something more important, more vital to us than curtains to discuss, now that we are alone at last

OLIVIA I wasn't going to discuss them, dear

GEORGE I'm always glad to see Aunt Julia in my house, but I wish she hadn't chosen this day of all days to come to lunch

OLIVIA It wasn't Aunt Julia's fault. It was really Mr Pim who chose the wrong day

GEORGE (*fiercely*) Good Heavens, is it true?

OLIVIA About Jacob Telworthy?

GEORGE You told me he was dead. You always said that he was dead. You—you——

OLIVIA Well, I always thought that he was dead. He was as dead as anybody could be. All the papers said he was dead

GEORGE (*scornfully*) The papers!

OLIVIA (*as if this would settle it for GEORGE*) *The Times* said he was dead. There was a paragraph about him. Apparently even his death was fraudulent.

GEORGE Yes, yes, I'm not blaming you, Olivia, but what are we going to do, that's the question, what are we going to do? My God, it's horrible! You've never been married to me at all! You don't seem to understand

OLIVIA It is a little difficult to realise. You see, it doesn't seem to have made any difference to our happiness

GEORGE No, that's what's so terrible. I mean—well, of course, we were quite innocent in the matter. But, at the same time, nothing can get over the fact that we—-we had no right to—to be happy

OLIVIA Would you rather we had been miserable?

GEORGE You're Telworthy's wife, that's what you don't seem to understand. You're Telworthy's wife. You—er—forgive me, Olivia, but it's the horrible truth—you committed bigamy when you married me (*In horror*) Bigamy!

OLIVIA It is an ugly word, isn't it?

GEORGE Yes, but don't you understand—— (*He jumps up and comes over to her*) Look here, Olivia, old girl, the whole thing is nonsense, eh? It isn't your husband, it's some other Telworthy that this fellow met. That's right, isn't it? Some other shady swindler who turned up on the boat, eh? This sort of thing doesn't happen

to people like *us*—committing bigamy and all that Some other fellow

OLIVIA (*shaking her head*) I knew all the shady swindlers in Sydney, George. . . They came to dinner There were no others called Telworthy

(GEORGE *goes back despondently to his seat*)

GEORGE Well, what are we going to do ?

OLIVIA You sent Mr Pim away so quickly He might have told us things Telworthy's plans Where he is now You hurried him away so quickly

GEORGE I've sent a note round to ask him to come back My idea at the moment was to get him out of the house—to hush things up

OLIVIA You can't hush up two husbands

GEORGE (*in despair*) You can't Everybody will know Everybody !

OLIVIA The children, Aunt Julia, they may as well know now as later Mr Pim must, of course

GEORGE I do not propose to discuss my private affairs with Mr Pim——

OLIVIA But he's mixed himself up in them rather, hasn't he, and if you're going to ask him questions——

GEORGE I only propose to ask him one question I shall ask him if he is absolutely certain of the man's name I can do that quite easily without letting him know the reason for my inquiry

OLIVIA You couldn't make a mistake about a name like Telworthy But he might tell us something about Telworthy's plans Perhaps he's going back to Australia at once Perhaps he thinks I'm dead, too Perhaps—oh, there are so many things I want to know

GEORGE Yes, yes, dear It would be interesting to—that is, one naturally wants to know these things, but of course it doesn't make any real difference

OLIVIA (*surprised*) No difference ?

GEORGE Well, that is to say, you're as much his wife if he's in Australia as you are if he's in England

OLIVIA I am not his wife at all.

GEORGE But, Olivia, surely you understand the position——

OLIVIA (*shaking her head*) Jacob Telworthy may be

alive, but I am not his wife I ceased to be his wife when I became yours

GEORGE You never *were* my wife That is the terrible part of it Our union—you make me say it, Olivia—has been unhallowed by the Church Unhallowed even by the Law Legally, we have been living in—living in—well, the point is, how does the Law stand? I imagine that Telworthy could get a—a divorce Oh, it seems impossible that things like this can be happening to us

OLIVIA (*joyfully*) A divorce?

GEORGE I—I imagine so

OLIVIA But then we could *really* get married, and we shouldn't be living in—living in—whatever we were living in before

GEORGE I can't understand you, Olivia You talk about it so calmly, as if there was nothing blameworthy in being divorced, as if there was nothing unusual in my marrying a divorced woman, as if there was nothing wrong in our having lived together for years without having been married.

OLIVIA What seems wrong to me is that I lived for five years with a bad man whom I hated What seems right to me is that I lived for five years with a good man whom I love

GEORGE Yes, yes, my dear, I know But right and wrong don't settle themselves as easily as that We've been living together when you were Telworthy's wife That's *wrong*

OLIVIA Do you mean wicked?

GEORGE. Well, no doubt the Court would consider that we acted in perfect innocence——

OLIVIA What Court?

GEORGE These things have to be done legally, of course I believe the proper method is a nullity suit, declaring our marriage null and—er—void It would, so to speak, wipe out these years of—er——

OLIVIA Wickedness?

GEORGE Of irregular union, and—er—then——

OLIVIA Then I could go back to Jacob Do you really mean that, George?

GEORGE (*uneasily*) Well, dear, you see—that's how things are—one can't get away from—er——

OLIVIA What you feel is that Telworthy has the greater claim? You are prepared to—make way for him?

GEORGE Both the Church and the Law would say that I had no claim at all, I'm afraid I—I suppose I haven't.

OLIVIA I see (*She looks at him curiously*) Thank you for making it so clear, George

GEORGE Of course, whether or not you go back to—er—Telworthy is another matter altogether That would naturally be for you to decide

OLIVIA (*cheerfully*) For me and Jacko to decide

GEORGE Er—Jacko?

OLIVIA I used to call my first husband—I mean my only husband—Jacko I didn't like the name of Jacob, and Jacko seemed to suit him somehow He had very long arms Dear Jacko

GEORGE (*annoyed*) You don't seem to realise that this is not a joke, Olivia

OLIVIA (*a trifle hysterically*) It may not be a joke, but it *is* funny, isn't it?

GEORGE I must say I don't see anything funny in a tragedy that has wrecked two lives

OLIVIA Two? Oh, but Jacko's life isn't wrecked It has just been miraculously restored to him And a wife, too There's nothing tragic for Jacko in it

GEORGE (*stiffly*) I was referring to *our* two lives—yours and mine

OLIVIA Yours, George? Your life isn't wrecked The Court will absolve you of all blame, your friends will sympathise with you, and tell you that I was a designing woman who deliberately took you in, your Aunt Julia——

GEORGE (*overwrought*) Stop it! What do you mean? Have you no heart? Do you think I *want* to lose you, Olivia? Do you think I *want* my home broken up like this? Haven't you been happy with me these last five years?

OLIVIA Very happy

GEORGE Well then, how can you talk like that?

OLIVIA (*pathetically*) But you want to send me away

GEORGE There you go again I don't *want* to I have hardly had time to realise just what it will mean to me when you go The fact is I simply daren't realise it I daren't think about it

OLIVIA (*earnestly*) Try thinking about it, George

GEORGE And you talk as if I *wanted* to send you away !

OLIVIA Try thinking about it, George

GEORGE You don't seem to understand that I'm not *sending* you away You simply aren't mine to keep

OLIVIA Whose am I ?

GEORGE Your husband's Telworthy's

OLIVIA (*gently*) If I belong to anybody but myself, I think I belong to you

GEORGE Not in the eyes of the Law Not in the eyes of the Church Not even in the eyes of—er—

OLIVIA The County ?

GEORGE (*annoyed*) I was about to say " Heaven "

OLIVIA (*unimpressed*) Oh !

GEORGE That this should happen to us !

(*He gets up and walks about the room, wondering when he will wake up from this impossible dream* OLIVIA works in silence Then she stands up and shakes out her curtains)

OLIVIA (*looking at them*) I do hope Jacko will like these

GEORGE What ! You—— (*Going up to her*) Olivia, Olivia, have you no heart ?

OLIVIA Ought you to talk like that to another man's wife ?

GEORGE Confound it, is this just a joke to you ?

OLIVIA You must forgive me, George; I am a little over-excited—at the thought of returning to Jacob, I suppose

GEORGE Do you *want* to return to him ?

OLIVIA One wants to do what is right. In the eyes of—er—Heaven.

GEORGE Seeing what sort of man he is, I have no doubt that you could get a separation, supposing that he didn't—er—divorce you I don't know *what* is best I must consult my solicitor The whole position has been sprung

on us, and—(*miserably*) I don't know, I don't know I can't take it all in

OLIVIA Wouldn't you like to consult your Aunt Julia too? She could tell you what the County—I mean what Heaven really thought about it

GEORGE Yes, yes Aunt Julia has plenty of common sense You're quite right, Olivia This isn't a thing we can keep from the family

OLIVIA Do I still call her *Aunt Julia*?

GEORGE (*looking up from his paces*) What? What?
(ANNE comes in) Well, what is it?

ANNE Mr Pim says he will come down at once, sir

GEORGE Oh, thank you, thank you

[ANNE goes out]

OLIVIA George, Mr Pim has got to know

GEORGE I don't see the necessity

OLIVIA Not even for me? When a woman suddenly hears that her long-lost husband is restored to her, don't you think she wants to ask questions? Where is he living, and how is he looking, and—

GEORGE (*coldly*) Of course, if you are interested in these things—

OLIVIA How can I help being? Don't be so silly, George We *must* know what Jacko—

GEORGE (*annoyed*) I wish you wouldn't call him by that ridiculous name

OLIVIA My husband—

GEORGE (*wincing*) Yes, well—your husband?

OLIVIA Well, we must know his plans—where we can communicate with him, and so on.

GEORGE I have no wish to communicate with him

OLIVIA I'm afraid you'll have to, dear

GEORGE. I don't see the necessity

OLIVIA Well, you'll want to—to apologise to him for living with his wife for so long And as I belong to him, he ought to be told where he can—call for me

GEORGE (*after a struggle*) You put it in a very peculiar way, but I see your point (*With a shudder*) Oh, the horrible publicity of it all!

OLIVIA (*going up to him and comforting him*) Poor George. Dear, don't think I don't sympathise with you I under-

stand so exactly what you are feeling. The publicity! It's terrible.

GEORGE (*miserably*) I want to do what's right, Olivia. You believe that?

OLIVIA Of course I do. It's only that we don't quite agree as to what is right and what is wrong.

GEORGE It isn't a question of agreeing. Right is right, and wrong is wrong, all the world over.

OLIVIA (*with a sad little smile*) But more particularly in Buckinghamshire, I think.

GEORGE If I only considered myself, I should say "Let us pack this man Telworthy back to Australia. He would make no claim. He would accept money to go away and say nothing about it." If I consulted simply my own happiness, Olivia, that is what I should say. But when I consult—er——

OLIVIA (*surprised*) Mine?

GEORGE My conscience——

OLIVIA Oh!

GEORGE Then I can't do it. It's wrong. (*He is at the window as he says this*)

OLIVIA (*making her first and last appeal*) George, aren't I worth a little——

GEORGE (*turning round*) H'sh! Dinah! (*Loudly for DINAH'S benefit*) Well, then I'll write to him and—— Ah, Dinah, where's Aunt Julia?

DINAH (*coming in*). We've seen the pigs, and now she's discussing the Art of Landseer with Brian. I just came to ask——

OLIVIA Dinah, dear, bring Aunt Julia here. And Brian too. We have things we want to talk about with you all.

GEORGE (*outraged*) Olivia!

DINAH Righto. What fun!

[Exit DINAH]

GEORGE Olivia, you don't seriously suggest that we should discuss these things with a child like Dinah and a young man like Strange, a mere acquaintance.

OLIVIA Dinah will have to know. I'm very fond of her, George. You can't send me away without telling Dinah. And Brian is my friend. You have your solicitor

and your aunt and your conscience to consult—mayn't I even have Brian?

GEORGE (*forgetting*) I should have thought that your husband—

OLIVIA Yes, but we don't know where Jacko is

GEORGE I was not referring to—Telworthy

OLIVIA Well then?

GEORGE Well, naturally I—you mustn't— Oh, this is horrible!

(*He comes back to his desk as the others come in*)

OLIVIA (*getting up*) George and I have had some rather bad news, Aunt Julia We wanted your advice Where will you sit?

LADY MARDEN Thank you, Olivia I can sit down by myself (*She does so, near GEORGE DINAH sits on the sofa with OLIVIA, and BRIAN half leans against the back of it There is a hush of expectation*) What is it? Money, I suppose Nobody's safe nowadays

GEORGE (*signalling for help*) Olivia—

OLIVIA We've just heard that my first husband is still alive

DINAH Telworthy!

BRIAN Good Lord!

LADY MARDEN George!

DINAH (*excitedly*) And only this morning I was saying that nothing ever happened in this house! (*Remorsefully to OLIVIA*) Darling, I don't mean that Darling one!

LADY MARDEN What does this mean, George? I leave you for ten minutes—barely ten minutes—to go and look at the pigs, and when I come back you tell me that Olivia is a bigamist

BRIAN (*indignantly*) I say—

OLIVIA (*restraining him*) H'sh!

BRIAN (*to OLIVIA*) If this is a row, I'm on your side

LADY MARDEN Well, George?

GEORGE I'm afraid it's true, Aunt Julia. We heard the news just before lunch—just before you came. We've only this moment had an opportunity of talking about it, of wondering what to do

LADY MARDEN. What was his name—Tel—something—

OLIVIA Jacob Telworthy

LADY MARDEN So he's alive still ?

GEORGE Apparently There seems to be no doubt about it

LADY MARDEN (*to OLIVIA*) Didn't you see him die ? I should always want to see my husband die before I married again Not that I approve of second marriages, anyhow I told you so at the time, George

OLIVIA And me, Aunt Julia

LADY MARDEN Did I ? Well, I generally say what I think

GEORGE I ought to tell you, Aunt Julia, that no blame attaches to Olivia over this. Of that I am perfectly satisfied It's nobody's fault, except——

LADY MARDEN Except Telworthy's He seems to have been rather careless Well, what are you going to do about it ?

GEORGE That's just it It's a terrible situation There's bound to be so much publicity Not only all this, but——but Telworthy's past and——and everything

LADY MARDEN I should have said that it was Telworthy's present which was the trouble Had he a past as well ?

OLIVIA He was a fraudulent company promoter He went to prison a good deal

LADY MARDEN George, you never told me this !

GEORGE I——er——

OLIVIA I don't see why he should want to talk about it

DINAH (*indignantly*) What's it got to do with Olivia, anyhow ? It's not *her* fault

LADY MARDEN (*sarcastically*) Oh no, I daresay it's mine.

OLIVIA (*to GEORGE*) You wanted to ask Aunt Julia what was the right thing to do.

BRIAN (*bursting out*) Good Heavens, what is there to do except the one and only thing ? (*They all look at him and he becomes embarrassed*) I'm sorry. You don't want me to——

OLIVIA I do, Brian

LADY MARDEN Well, go on, Mr Strange. What would you do in George's position ?

BRIAN Do ? Say to the woman I loved, "You're *mine*, and let this other damned fellow come and take you from me if he can ! " And he couldn't—how could he ?—not if the woman chose *me*

(LADY MARDEN gazes at BRIAN in amazement, GEORGE in anger OLIVIA presses his hand gratefully He has said what she has been waiting—oh, so eagerly—for GEORGE to say)

DINAH (adoringly) Oh, Brian ! (In a whisper) It is me, isn't it, and not Olivia ?

BRIAN You baby, of course !

LADY MARDEN I'm afraid, Mr Strange, your morals are as peculiar as your views on Art If you had led a more healthy life——

BRIAN This is not a question of morals or of art, it's a question of love

DINAH Hear, hear !

LADY MARDEN (to GEORGE) Isn't it that girl's bedtime yet ?

OLIVIA (to DINAH) We'll let her sit up a little longer if she's good

DINAH I will be good, Olivia, only I thought anybody, however important a debate was, was allowed to say "Hear, hear !"

GEORGE (coldly) I really think we could discuss this better if Mr Strange took Dinah out for a walk Strange, if you—er——

OLIVIA Tell them what you have settled first, George

LADY MARDEN Settled ? What is there to be settled ? It settles itself

GEORGE (sadly) That's just it

LADY MARDEN The marriage must be annulled—is that the word, George ?

GEORGE I presume so

LADY MARDEN One's solicitor will know all about that of course.

BRIAN And when the marriage has been annulled, what then ?

LADY MARDEN Presumably Olivia will return to her husband.

BRIAN (bitterly) And *that's* morality ! As expounded by Bishop Landseer !

GEORGE (*angered*) I don't know what you mean by Bishop Landseer. Morality is acting in accordance with the Laws of the Land and the Laws of the Church. I am quite prepared to believe that *your* creed embraces neither marriage nor monogamy, but my creed is different.

BRIAN (*fiercely*) My creed includes both marriage *and* monogamy, and monogamy means sticking to the woman you love, as long as she wants you.

LADY MARDEN (*calmly*) You suggest that George and Olivia should go on living together, although they have never been legally married, and wait for this Telworthy man to divorce her, and then—bless the man, what do you think the County would say?

BRIAN (*scornfully*) Does it matter?

DINAH Well, if you really want to know, the men would say, "Gad, she's a fine woman, I don't wonder he sticks to her," and the women would say, "I can't *think* what he sees in her to stick to her like that," and they'd both say, "After all, he may be a damn fool, but you can't deny he's a sportsman." That's what the County would say.

GEORGE (*indignantly*) Was it for this sort of thing, Olivia, that you insisted on having Dinah and Mr. Strange in here? To insult me in my own house?

LADY MARDEN I can't think what young people are coming to nowadays.

OLIVIA I think, dear, you and Brian had better go.

DINAH (*getting up*) We will go. But I'm just going to say one thing, Uncle George. Brian and I *are* going to marry each other, and when we are married we'll stick to each other, however many of our dead husbands and wives turn up!

[*She goes out indignantly, followed by BRIAN.*]

GEORGE Upon my word, this is a pleasant discussion.

OLIVIA: I think the discussion is over, George. It is only a question of where I shall go, while you are bringing your—what sort of suit did you call it?

LADY MARDEN (*to GEORGE*): Nullity suit. I suppose that is the best thing?

GEORGE It's horrible. The awful publicity. That it

should be happening to *us*, that's what I can't get over

LADY MARDEN I don't remember anything of the sort in the Marden Family before, ever

GEORGE (*absently*) Lady Fanny

LADY MARDEN (*recollecting*) Yes, of course, but that was two hundred years ago The standards were different then Besides, it wasn't quite the same, anyhow

GEORGE (*absently*) No, it wasn't quite the same

LADY MARDEN No We shall all feel it Terribly

GEORGE (*his apology*) If there were any other way 'Olivia, what *can* I do? It *is* the only way, isn't it? All that that fellow said—of course, it sounds very well—but as things are *Is* there anything in marriage, or isn't there? You believe that there is, don't you? You aren't one of these Socialists Well, then, *can* we go on living together when you're another man's wife? It isn't only what people will say, but it *is* wrong, isn't it? And supposing he doesn't divorce you, are we to go on living together, unmarried, for *ever*? Olivia, you seem to think that I'm just thinking of the publicity—what people will say I'm not I'm not That comes in any way But I want to do what's right, what's best I don't mean what's best for *us*, what makes us happiest, I mean what's really best, what's rightest What anybody else would do in my place I don't know It's so unfair You're not my wife at all, but I want to do what's right Oh, Olivia, Olivia, you do understand, don't you?

(*They have both forgotten* LADY MARDEN OLIVIA *has never taken her eyes off him as he makes his last attempt to convince himself*)

OLIVIA (*almost tenderly*) So very, very well, George Oh, I understand just what you are feeling And oh, I do so wish that you could—(*with a little sigh*)—but then it wouldn't be George, not the George I married—(*with a rueful little laugh*)—or didn't quite marry

LADY MARDEN I must say, I think you are both talking a little wildly

OLIVIA (*repeating it, oh, so tenderly*) Or didn't—quite—marry (*She looks at him with all her heart in her eyes*

She is giving him his last chance to say "Damn Telworthy you're mine!" He struggles desperately with himself
Will he?—will he? But we shall never know,
for at that moment ANNE comes in)

ANNE Mr Pim is here, sir

GEORGE (*emerging from the struggle with an effort*) Pim?
Pim? On, ah, yes, of course Mr Pim (*Looking up*)
Where have you put him?

OLIVIA I want to see Mr Pim, too, George

LADY MARDEN Who on earth is Mr Pim?

OLIVIA Show him in here, Anne

ANNE Yes, madam

[*She goes out*]

OLIVIA It was Mr Pim who told us about my husband
He came across with him in the boat, and recognised
him as the Telworthy he knew in Australia!

LADY MARDEN Oh! Shall I be in the way?

GEORGE No, no It doesn't matter, does it, Olivia?

OLIVIA Please stay

ANNE *enters followed by MR PIM*

ANNE Mr Pim

GEORGE (*pulling himself together*) Ah, Mr Pim! Very
good of you to have come The fact is—er—— (*It is*
too much for him, he looks despairingly at OLIVIA)

OLIVIA We're so sorry to trouble you, Mr Pim By
the way, do you know Lady Marden? (*MR PIM and*
LADY MARDEN bow to each other) Do come and sit down,
won't you? (*She makes room for him on the sofa next to*
her) The fact is, Mr Pim, you gave us rather a surprise
this morning, and before we had time to realise what it
all meant, you had gone

MR. PIM A surprise, Mrs Marden? Dear me, not an
unpleasant one, I hope?

OLIVIA Well, rather a—surprising one

GEORGE Olivia, allow me a moment Mr Pim, you
mentioned a man called Telworthy this morning My
wife used to—that is to say, I used to—that is, there are
reasons——

OLIVIA I think we had better be perfectly frank, George

LADY MARDEN I am sixty-five years of age, Mr Pim,
and I can say that I've never had a moment's uneasiness
by telling the truth

MR PIM (*after a desperate effort to keep up with the conversation*) Oh! I—er—I'm afraid I am rather at sea Have I—er—left anything unsaid in presenting my credential's to you this morning? This Telworthy whom you mention—I seem to remember the name——

OLIVIA Mr Pim, you told us this morning of a man whom you had met on the boat, a man who had come down in the world, whom you had known in Sydney A man called Telworthy

MR PIM (*relieved*) Ah, yes, yes, of course I did say Telworthy, didn't I? Most curious coincidence, Lady Marden Poor man, poor man! Let me see, it must have been ten years ago——

GEORGE Just a moment, Mr Pim You're quite sure that his name was Telworthy?

MR PIM Telworthy—Telworthy—didn't I say Telworthy? Yes, that was it—Telworthy Poor fellow!

OLIVIA I'm going to be perfectly frank with you, Mr Pim I feel quite sure that I can trust you This man Telworthy whom you met is my husband

MR PIM Your husband? (*He looks in mild surprise at GEORGE*) But—er——

OLIVIA My first husband His death was announced six years ago I had left him some years before that, but there seems no doubt from your story that he's still alive His record—the country he comes from—above all, the very unusual name—Telworthy

MR PIM. Telworthy—yes—certainly a most peculiar name I remember saying so Your first husband? Dear me! Dear me!

GEORGE You understand, Mr Pim, that all this is in absolute confidence

MR PIM Of course, of course

OLIVIA Well, since he is my husband, we naturally want to know something about him Where is he now, for instance?

MR PIM (*surprised*) Where is he now? But surely I told you? I told you what happened at Marseilles?

GEORGE At Marseilles?

MR PIM Yes, yes, poor fellow, it was most unfortunate (*Quite happy again*) You must understand, Lady Marden,

that although I had met the poor fellow before in Australia, I was never in any way intimate---

GEORGE (*thumping the desk*) Where is he *now*, that's what we want to know ?

(MR PIM turns to him with a start)

OLIVIA Please, Mr Pim !

PIM Where is he now ? But—but didn't I tell you of the curious fatality at Marseilles—poor fellow—the fish-bone ?

ALL Fish-bone ?

MR PIM Yes, yes, a herring, I understand

OLIVIA (*understanding first*) Do you mean he's dead ?

MR PIM Dead—of course—didn't I—— ?

OLIVIA (*laughing hysterically*) Oh, Mr Pim, you—oh, what a husband to have—oh, I—— (*But that is all she can say for the moment*)

LADY MARDEN Pull yourself together, Olivia This is so unhealthy for you (*To PIM*) So he really *is* dead this time ?

MR PIM Oh, undoubtedly, undoubtedly A fish-bone lodged in his throat

GEORGE (*trying to realise it*) Dead !

OLIVIA (*struggling with her laughter*) I think you must excuse me, Mr Pim—I can never thank you enough—a herring—there's something about a herring—morality depends on such little things—George, you—— (*Shaking her head at him in a weak state of laughter, she hurries out of the room*)

MR PIM Dear me ! Dear me !

GEORGE Now, let us have this quite clear, Mr Pim You say that the man, Telworthy, Jacob Telworthy, is dead ?

MR PIM Telworthy—yes—didn't I say Telworthy ? This man I was telling you about——

GEORGE He's dead ?

MR PIM Yes, yes, he died at Marseilles

LADY MARDEN A dispensation of Providence, George. One can look at it in no other light

GEORGE Dead ! (*Suddenly annoyed*) Really, Mr Pim, I think you might have told us before

MR PIM But I—I was telling you—I——

GEORGE If you had only told us the whole story at once, instead of in two—two instalments like this, you would have saved us all a good deal of anxiety

MR PIM Really, I——

LADY MARDEN I am sure Mr Pim meant well, George, but it seems a pity he couldn't have said so before If the man was dead, *why* try to hush it up?

MR PIM (*lost again*) Really, Lady Marden, I——

GEORGE (*getting up*) Well, well, at any rate, I am much obliged to you, Mr Pim, for having come down to us this afternoon Dead! *De mortuis*, and so forth, but the situation would have been impossible had he lived Good-bye! (*Holding out his hand*) Good-bye!

LADY MARDEN Good-bye, Mr Pim

MR PIM Good-bye, good-bye! (*GEORGE takes him to the door*) Of course, if I had—(*to himself*) Telworthy—I think that was the name (*He goes out, still wondering*)

GEORGE (*with a sigh of thankfulness*) Well! This is wonderful news, Aunt Julia

LADY MARDEN Most providential! You understand, of course, that you are not married to Olivia?

GEORGE (*who didn't*) Not married?

LADY MARDEN If her first husband only died at Marseilles a few days ago——

GEORGE Good Heavens!

LADY MARDEN Not that it matters You can get married quietly again Nobody need know

GEORGE (*considering it*) Yes yes Then all these years we have been—ei—— Yes

LADY MARDEN Who's going to know?

GEORGE Yes, yes, that's true And in perfect innocence, too

LADY MARDEN I should suggest a Registry Office in London

GEORGE A Registry Office, yes

LADY MARDEN Better go up to town this afternoon Can't do it too quickly

GEORGE Yes, yes We can stay at an hotel——

LADY MARDEN (*surprised*) George!

GEORGE What?

LADY MARDEN You will stay at your club

GEORGE Oh—oh— yes, of course, Aunt Julia

LADY MARDEN Better take your solicitor with you to
be on the safe side To the Registry Office, I mean

GEORGE Yes

LADY MARDEN (*getting up*) Well, I must be getting
along, George Say good-bye to Olivia for me And
those children Of course, you won't allow this absurd
love-business between them to come to anything "

GEORGE Most certainly not Good-bye, Aunt Julia "

LADY MARDEN (*indicating the windows*) I'll go *this way*
(*As she goes*) And get Olivia out more, George I don't
like these hysterics You want to be firm with her.

GEORGE (*firmlly*) Yes, yes ' Good-bye ' "

(*He waves to her and then goes back to his seat*)

(OLIVIA comes in, and stands in the middle of the room
looking at him He comes to her eagerly)

GEORGE (*holding out his hands*) Olivia ' Olivia ' "

(*But it is not so easy as that*)

OLIVIA (*drawing herself up proudly*) Mrs Telworthy ' "

ACT III

OLIVIA *is standing where we left her at the end of the last act*

GEORGE (*taken aback*) Olivia, I—I don't understand

OLIVIA (*leaving melodrama with a little laugh and coming down to him*) Poor George ! Did I frighten you rather ?

GEORGE You're so strange to-day I don't understand you You're not like the Olivia I know

(*They sit down on the sofa together*)

OLIVIA Perhaps you don't know me very well after all

GEORGE (*affectionately*) Oh, that's nonsense, old girl You're just my Olivia

OLIVIA And yet it seemed as though I wasn't going to be your Olivia half an hour ago

GEORGE (*with a shudder*) Don't talk about it It doesn't bear thinking about Well, thank Heaven that's over Now we can get married again quietly and nobody will be any the wiser

OLIVIA Married again ?

GEORGE Yes, dear As you—er—(*he laughs uneasily*) said just now, you are Mrs Telworthy Just for the moment. But we can soon put that right My idea was to go up this evening and—er—make arrangements, and if you come up to-morrow morning, if we can manage it by then, we could get quietly married at a Registry Office, and—er—nobody any the wiser

OLIVIA Yes, I see You want me to marry you at a Registry Office to-morrow ?

GEORGE If we can arrange it by then I don't know how long these things take, but I should imagine there would be no difficulty

OLIVIA Oh no, that part ought to be quite easy But——
(*She hesitates*)

GEORGE But what?

OLIVIA Well, if you want to marry me to-morrow, George, oughtn't you to propose to me first?

GEORGE (*amazed*) Propose?

OLIVIA Yes It is usual, isn't it, to propose to a person before you marry her, and—and we want to do the usual thing, don't we?

GEORGE (*upset*) But you—but we

OLIVIA You see, dear, you're George Marden, and I'm Olivia Telworthy, and you—you're attracted by me, and think I would make you a good wife, and you want to marry me Well, naturally you propose to me first, and—tell me how much you are attracted by me, and what a good wife you think I shall make, and how badly you want to marry me

GEORGE (*falling into the humour of it, as he thinks*) The baby! Did she want to be proposed to all over again?

OLIVIA Well, she did rather

GEORGE (*rather fancying himself as an actor*) She shall then (*He adopts what he considers to be an appropriate attitude*) Mrs Telworthy, I have long admired you in silence, and the time has now come to put my admiration into words Er—— (*But apparently he finds a difficulty*)

OLIVIA (*hopefully*) Into words

GEORGE Er——

OLIVIA (*with the idea of helping*) Oh, Mr Marden!

GEORGE Er—may I call you Olivia?

OLIVIA Yes, George

GEORGE (*taking her hand*) Olivia—I—— (*He hesitates*)

OLIVIA I don't want to interrupt, but oughtn't you to be on your knees? It is—usual, I believe If one of the servants came in, you could say you were looking for my scissors

GEORGE Really, Olivia, you must allow me to manage my own proposal in my own way

OLIVIA (*meekly*) I'm sorry Do go on

GEORGE Well, er—confound it, Olivia, I love you Will you marry me ?

OLIVIA Thank you, George, I will think it over

GEORGE (*laughing*) Silly girl ! Well then, to-morrow morning No wedding-cake, I'm afraid, Olivia (*He laughs again*) But we'll go and have a good lunch somewhere.

OLIVIA I will think it over, George

GEORGE (*good-humouredly*) Well, give us a kiss while you're thinking

OLIVIA I'm afraid you mustn't kiss me until we are actually engaged

GEORGE (*laughing uneasily*) Oh, we needn't take it as seriously as all that

OLIVIA But a woman must take a proposal seriously

GEORGE (*alarmed at last*) What do you mean ?

OLIVIA I mean that the whole question, as I heard somebody say once, demands much more anxious thought than either of us has given it These hasty marriages——

GEORGE Hasty !

OLIVIA Well, you've only just proposed to me, and you want to marry me to-morrow

GEORGE Now you're talking perfect nonsense, Olivia You know quite well that our case is utterly different from—from any other

OLIVIA All the same, one has to ask oneself questions With a young girl like—well, with a young girl, love may well seem to be all that matters But with a woman of my age, it is different I have to ask myself if you can afford to support a wife

GEORGE (*coldly*) Fortunately that is a question that you can very easily answer for yourself

OLIVIA Well, but I have been hearing rather bad reports lately What with taxes always going up, and rents always going down, some of our landowners are getting into rather straitened circumstances At least, so I'm told.

GEORGE I don't know what you're talking about

OLIVIA (*surprised*) Oh, isn't it true ? I heard of a case only this morning—a landowner who always seemed

to be very comfortably off, but who couldn't afford an allowance for his only niece when she wanted to get married. It made me think that one oughtn't to judge by appearances.

GEORGE You know perfectly well that I can afford to support a wife as my wife *should* be supported.

OLIVIA I'm so glad, dear. Then your income—you aren't getting anxious at all?

GEORGE (*stiffly*) You know perfectly well what my income is. I see no reason for anxiety in the future.

OLIVIA Ah, well, then we needn't think about that any more. Well, then, there is another thing to be considered.

GEORGE I can't make out what you're up to. Don't you want to get married, to—er—legalise this extraordinary situation in which we are placed?

OLIVIA I want to be sure that I am going to be happy, George. I can't just jump at the very first offer I have had since my husband died, without considering the whole question very carefully.

GEORGE So I'm under consideration, eh?

OLIVIA Every suitor is.

GEORGE (*sarcastically, as he thinks*) Well, go on.

OLIVIA Well, then, there's your niece. You have a niece who lives with you. Of course, Dinah is a delightful girl, but one doesn't like marrying into a household in which there is another grown-up woman. But perhaps she will be getting married herself soon?

GEORGE I see no prospect of it.

OLIVIA I think it would make it much easier if she did.

GEORGE Is this a threat, Olivia? Are you telling me that if I do not allow young Strange to marry Dinah, you will not marry me?

OLIVIA A threat? Oh, no, George.

GEORGE Then what does it mean?

OLIVIA I'm just wondering if you love me as much as Brian loves Dinah. You *do* love me?

GEORGE (*from his heart*) You know I do, old girl. (*He comes to her*)

OLIVIA You're not just attracted by my pretty face?
. . . Is it a pretty face?

GEORGE It's an adorable one (*He tries to kiss it, but she turns away*)

OLIVIA How can I be sure that it is not *only* my face which makes you think that you care for me? Love which rests upon a mere outward attraction cannot lead to any lasting happiness—as one of our thinkers has observed

GEORGE What's come over you, Olivia? I don't understand what you're driving at Why should you doubt my love?

OLIVIA Ah!—Why?

GEORGE You can't pretend that we haven't been happy together I've—I've been a good pal to you, eh? We—we suit each other, old girl

OLIVIA Do we?

GEORGE Of course we do

OLIVIA I wonder When two people of our age think of getting married, one wants to be very sure that there is real community of ideas between them Whether it is a comparatively trivial matter, like the right colour for a curtain, or some very much more serious question of conduct which arises, one wants to feel that there is some chance of agreement between husband and wife

GEORGE We—we love each other, old girl

OLIVIA We do now, yes But what shall we be like in five years' time? Supposing that after we have been married five years, we found ourselves estranged from each other upon such questions as Dinah's future, or the decorations of the drawing-room, or even the advice to give to a friend who had innocently contracted a bigamous marriage? How bitterly we should regret then our hasty plunge into a matrimony which was no true partnership, whether of tastes, or of ideas, or even of consciences! (*With a sigh*) Ah me!

GEORGE (*nastily*) Unfortunately for your argument, Olivia, I can answer you out of your own mouth You seem to have forgotten what you said this morning in the case of—er—young Strange

OLIVIA (*reproachfully*) Is it quite fair, George, to drag up what was said this morning?

GEORGE You've brought it on yourself

OLIVIA I ? Well, and what did I say this morning ?

GEORGE You said that it was quite enough that Strange was a gentleman and in love with Dinah for me to let them marry each other

OLIVIA Oh ! Is that enough, George ?

GEORGE (*triumphantly*) You said so

OLIVIA (*meekly*) Well, if you think so, too, I—I don't mind risking it

GEORGE (*kindly*) Aha, my dear ! You see

OLIVIA Then you do think it's enough ?

GEORGE I—er—— Yes, yes, I—I think so

OLIVIA (*going to him*) My darling one ! Then we can have a double wedding How jolly !

GEORGE (*astounded*) A double one !

OLIVIA Yes You and me, Brian and Dinah

GEORGE (*firmly*) Now look here, Olivia, understand once and for all, I am not to be blackmailed into giving my consent to Dinah's engagement Neither blackmailed nor tricked Our marriage has nothing whatever to do with Dinah's

OLIVIA No, dear I quite understand They may take place about the same time, but they have nothing to do with each other

GEORGE I see no prospect of Dinah's marriage taking place for many years

OLIVIA No, dear, that was what I said

GEORGE (*not understanding for the moment*) You said

‘ I see Now, Olivia, let us have this perfectly clear You apparently insist on treating my—er—proposal as serious

OLIVIA (*surprised*) Wasn't it serious ? Were you trifling with me ?

GEORGE You know quite well what I mean ‘ You treat it as an ordinary proposal from a man to a woman who have never been more than acquaintances before Very well, then Will you tell me what you propose to do, if you decide to—ah—refuse me ? You do not suggest that we should go on living together—unmarried ?

OLIVIA (*shocked*) Of course not, George ! What would

the County—I mean Heaven—I mean the Law—I mean, of *course* not! Besides, it's so unnecessary. If I decide to accept you, of *course* I shall marry you.

GEORGE Quite so. And if you—ah—decide to refuse me? What will you do?

OLIVIA Nothing.

GEORGE Meaning by that?

OLIVIA Just that, George. I shall stay here—just as before. I like this house. It wants a little re-decorating, perhaps, but I do like it, George. Yes, I shall be quite happy here.

GEORGE I see. You will continue to live down here—in spite of what you said just now about the immorality of it.

OLIVIA (*surprised*) But there's nothing immoral in a widow living alone in a big country house, with perhaps the niece of a friend of hers staying with her, just to keep her company.

GEORGE (*sarcastic*) And what shall I be doing, when you've so very kindly taken possession of my house for me?

OLIVIA I don't know, George. Travelling, I expect. You could come down sometimes with a chaperone. I suppose there would be nothing wrong in that.

GEORGE (*indignant*) Thank you! And what if I refuse to be turned out of my house?

OLIVIA Then, seeing that we can't *both* be in it, it looks as though you'd have to turn *me* out. (*Casually*) I suppose there are legal ways of doing these things. You'd have to consult your solicitor again.

GEORGE (*amazed*) Legal ways?

OLIVIA Well, you couldn't *throw* me out, could you? You'd have to get an injunction against me—or prosecute me for trespass—or something. It would make an awfully unusual case, wouldn't it? The papers would be full of it.

GEORGE You must be mad!

OLIVIA (*dreamily*) Widow of well-known ex-convict takes possession of J.P.'s house. Popular country gentleman denied entrance to his own home. Doomed to travel.

GEORGE (*angrily*) I've had enough of this Do you mean all this nonsense?

OLIVIA I do mean, George, that I am in no hurry to go up to London and get married I love the country just now, and (*with a sigh*) after this morning, I'm—rather tired of husbands

GEORGE (*in a rage*) I've never heard so much—damned nonsense in my life I will leave you to come to your senses (*He goes out indignantly*)

(OLIVIA, who has forgiven him already, throws a loving kiss after him, and then turns triumphantly to her dear curtains She takes them, smiling, to the sofa, and has just got to work again, when MR PIM appears at the open window.)

PIM (*in a whisper*) Er, may I come in, Mrs Marden?

OLIVIA (*turning round in surprise*) Mr Pim!

PIM (*anxiously*) Mr Marden is—er—not here?

OLIVIA (*getting up*) Do you want to see him? I will tell him

PIM No, no, no! Not for the world! (*He comes in and looks anxiously at the door*) There is no immediate danger of his returning, Mrs Marden?

OLIVIA (*surprised*) No, I don't think so What is it? You—

PIM I took the liberty of returning by the window in the hope of—er—coming upon you alone, Mrs Marden

OLIVIA Yes?

PIM (*still rather nervous*) I—er—Mr Marden will be very angry with me Quite rightly I blame myself entirely I do not know how I can have been so stupid

OLIVIA What is it, Mr Pim? Has my husband come to life again?

PIM Mrs Marden, I throw myself on your mercy entirely The fact is—his name was Polwittle

OLIVIA (*at a loss*) Whose? My husband's?

PIM Yes, yes The name came back to me suddenly, just as I reached the gate Polwittle, poor fellow

OLIVIA But, Mr Pim, my husband's name was Telworthy.

PIM No, no, Polwittle

OLIVIA But really, I ought to

PIM (*firmly*) Polwittle It came back to me suddenly

just as I reached the gate For the moment, I had thoughts of conveying the news by letter I was naturally disinclined to return in person, and—— Polwittle (*Proudly*) If you remember, I always said it was a curious name

OLIVIA But who *is* Polwittle?

PIM (*in surprise at her stupidity*) The man I have been telling you about, who met with the sad fatality at Marseilles Henry Polwittle—or was it Ernest? No, Henry I think Poor fellow

OLIVIA (*indignantly*) But you said his name was Telworthy! How *could* you?

PIM Yes, yes, I blame myself entirely

OLIVIA But how could you *think* of a name like Telworthy, if it wasn't Telworthy?

PIM (*eagerly*) Ah, that is the really interesting thing about the whole matter

OLIVIA Mr Pim, all your visits here to-day have been interesting

PIM Yes, but you see, on my first appearance here this morning I was received by—er—Miss Diana

OLIVIA Dinah

PIM Miss Dinah, yes She was in—er—rather a communicative mood, and she happened to mention, by way of passing the time, that before your marriage to Mr Marden you had been a Mrs —er——

OLIVIA Telworthy

PIM Yes, yes, Telworthy, of course She mentioned also Australia By some process of the brain—which strikes me as decidedly curious—when I was trying to recollect the name of the poor fellow on the boat, whom you remember I had also met in Australia, the fact that this other name was also stored in my memory, a name equally peculiar—this fact I say

OLIVIA (*seeing that the sentence is rapidly going to pieces*) Yes, I understand

PIM I blame myself, I blame myself entirely

OLIVIA Oh, you mustn't do that, Mr Pim It was really Dinah's fault for inflicting all our family history on you

PIM Oh, but a charming young woman I assure you I was very much interested in all that she told me (*Getting*

up) Well, Mrs —er—Maiden, I can only hope that you will forgive me for the needless distress I have caused you to-day

OLIVIA Oh, you mustn't worry about that—please

PIM And you will tell your husband—you will break the news to him?

OLIVIA (*smiling to herself*) I will—break the news to him

PIM You understand how it is that I thought it better to come to you in the first place?

OLIVIA I am very glad you did

PIM (*holding out his hand*) Then I will say good-bye and—er—

OLIVIA Just a moment, Mr Pim Let us have it quite clear this time You never knew my husband, Jacob Telworthy, you never met him in Australia, you never saw him on the boat, and nothing whatever happened to him at Marseilles Is that right?

PIM Yes, yes, that is so

OLIVIA So that, since he was supposed to have died in Australia six years ago, he is presumably still dead?

PIM Yes, yes, undoubtedly

OLIVIA (*holding out her hand with a charming smile*) Then good-bye, Mr Pim, and thank you so much for—for all your trouble

PIM Not at all, Mrs Marden I can only assure you I—

DINAH (*from the window*) Hullo, here's Mr Pim! (*She comes in, followed by BRIAN*)

PIM (*anxiously looking at the door in case MR MARDEN should come in*) Yes, yes, I—er—

DINAH Oh, Mr Pim, you mustn't run away without even saying how do you do! Such old friends as we are Why, it is ages since I saw you! Are you staying to tea?

*PIM I'm afraid I—

OLIVIA Mr Pim has to hurry away, Dinah You mustn't keep him

DINAH Well, but you'll come back again?

PIM I fear that I am only a passer-by, Miss—er—
Dinah

OLIVIA You can walk with him to the gate, dear

PIM (*gratefully to OLIVIA*) Thank you (*He edges towards the window*) If you would be so kind, Miss Dinah——

BRIAN I'll catch you up

DINAH Come along then, Mr Pim (*As they go out*) I want to hear all about your *first* wife You haven't really told me anything yet

(*OLIVIA resumes her work and BRIAN sits on the back of the sofa looking at her*)

BRIAN (*awkwardly*) I just wanted to say, If you don't think it cheek, that I'm—I'm on your side, if I may be, and if I can help you at all I should be very proud of being allowed to

OLIVIA (*looking up at him*) Brian, you dear That's sweet of you But it's quite all right now, you know

BRIAN Oh, I'm so glad

OLIVIA Yes, that's what Mr Pim came back to say He'd made a mistake about the name (*Smiling*) George is the only husband I have

BRIAN (*surprised*) What? You mean that the whole thing—that Pim—— (*With conviction*) Silly ass!

OLIVIA (*kindly*) Oh, well, he didn't mean to be (*After a pause*) Brian, do you know anything about the Law?

BRIAN I'm afraid not I hate the Law Why?

OLIVIA (*casually*) Oh, I just—I was wondering—thinking about all the shocks we've been through to-day Second marriages, and all that

BRIAN Oh! It's a rotten business

OLIVIA I suppose there's nothing wrong in getting married to the *same* person twice?

BRIAN A hundred times if you like, I should think

OLIVIA Oh?

BRIAN After all, in France, they always go through it twice, don't they? Once before the Mayor or somebody, and once in church

OLIVIA Of course they do! How silly of me I think it's rather a nice idea They ought to do it in England more

BRIAN Well, once will be enough for Dinah and me, if you can work it (*Anxiously*) Do you think there's any chance, Olivia?

OLIVIA (*smiling*) Every chance, dear

BRIAN (*jumping up*) I say, do you really? Have you squared him? I mean, has he——

OLIVIA Go and catch them up now We'll talk about it later on

BRIAN Bless you Righto

(*As he goes out by the window, GEORGE comes in at the door GEORGE stands looking after him, and then turns to OLIVIA, who is absorbed in her curtains He walks up and down the room, fidgeting with things, waiting for her to speak As she says nothing, he begins to talk himself, but in an obviously unconcerned way There is a pause after each answer of hers, before he gets out his next remark*)

GEORGE (*casually*) Good-looking fellow, Strange

OLIVIA (*equally casually*) Brian—yes, isn't he? And such a nice boy

GEORGE Got fifty pounds for a picture the other day, didn't he? Hey?

OLIVIA Yes Of course he has only just begun

GEORGE Critics think well of him, what?

OLIVIA They all say he has genius Oh, I don't think there's any doubt about it

GEORGE Of course, I don't profess to know anything about painting.

OLIVIA You've never had time to take it up, dear

GEORGE I know what I like, of course Can't say I see much in this new-fangled stuff If a man can paint, why can't he paint like—like Rubens or—or Reynolds?

OLIVIA I suppose we all have our own styles Brian will find his directly Of course, he's only just beginning

GEORGE But they think a lot of him, what?

OLIVIA Oh yes!

GEORGE H'm! Good-looking fellow

(*There is rather a longer silence this time GEORGE continues to hope that he is appearing casual and unconcerned He stands looking at OLIVIA's work for a moment*)

GEORGE Nearly finished 'em ?

OLIVIA Very nearly Are my scissors there ?

GEORGE (*looking round*) Scissors ?

OLIVIA Ah, here they are

GEORGE Where are you going to put 'em ?

OLIVIA (*as if really wondering*) I don't quite know

I *had* thought of this room, but—I'm not quite sure

GEORGE Brighten the room up a bit

OLIVIA Yes

GEORGE (*walking over to the present curtains*) H'm
They *are* a bit faded

OLIVIA (*shaking out hers, and looking at them critically*)
Sometimes I think I love them, and sometimes I'm not quite sure

GEORGE Best way is to hang 'em up and see how you like 'em then Always take 'em down again

OLIVIA That's rather a good idea, George !

GEORGE Best way

OLIVIA Yes I think we might do that The
only thing is—— (*she hesitates*)

GEORGE What ?

OLIVIA Well, the carpet and the chairs, and the cushions
and things——

GEORGE What about 'em ?

OLIVIA Well, if we had new curtains——

GEORGE You'd want a new carpet, eh ?

OLIVIA (*doubtfully*) Y—yes Well, new chair-covers
anyhow

GEORGE H'm Well, why not ?

OLIVIA Oh, but——

GEORGE (*with an awkward laugh*) We're not so hard up
as all that, you know

OLIVIA No, I suppose not (*Thoughtfully*) I suppose
it would mean that I should have to go up to London
for them That's rather a nuisance

GEORGE (*extremely casual*) Oh, I don't know We
might go up together one day

OLIVIA Well, of course if we *were* up—for anything
else—we could just look about us, and see if we could
find what we want

GEORGE That's what I meant

(*There is another silence* GEORGE *is wondering whether to come to closer quarters with the great question*)

OLIVIA Oh, by the way George——

GEORGE Yes?

OLIVIA (*innocently*) I told Brian, and I expect he'll tell Dinah, that Mr Pim had made a mistake about the name

GEORGE (*astonished*) You told Brian that Mr Pim——

OLIVIA Yes—I told him that the whole thing was a mistake It seemed the simplest way

GEORGE Olivia! Then you mean that Brian and Dinah think that—that we have been married all the time?

OLIVIA Yes They both think so now

GEORGE (*coming close to her*) Olivia, does that mean that you *are* thinking of marrying me?

OLIVIA At your old Registry Office?

GEORGE (*eagerly*) Yes!

OLIVIA To-morrow?

GEORGE Yes!

OLIVIA Do you want me to *very* much?

GEORGE My darling, you know I do!

OLIVIA (*a little apprehensive*) We should have to do it very quietly

GEORGE Of course, darling Nobody need know at all We don't *want* anybody to know And now that you've put Brian and Dinah off the scent, by telling them that Mr Pim made a mistake—— (*He breaks off, and says admuringly*) That was very clever of you, Olivia I should never have thought of that

OLIVIA (*innocently*) No, darling You don't think it was wrong, George?

GEORGE (*his verdict*) An innocent deception perfectly harmless

OLIVIA Yes, dear, that was what I thought about—about what I was doing

GEORGE Then you will come to-morrow? (*She nods*) And if we happen to see the carpet, or anything that you want——

OLIVIA Oh, what fun !

GEORGE (*beaming*) And a wedding lunch at the Carlton, what ? (*She nods eagerly*) And—and a bit of a honeymoon in Paris ?

OLIVIA Oh, George !

GEORGE (*hungrily*) Give us a kiss, old girl

OLIVIA (*lovingly*) George !

(*She holds up her cheek to him He kisses it, and then suddenly takes her in his arms*)

GEORGE Don't ever leave me, old girl

OLIVIA (*affectionately*) Don't ever send me away, old boy

GEORGE (*fervently*) I won't (*Awkwardly*) I—I don't think I would have, you know I—I——

(DINAH and BRIAN appear at the windows, having seen MR PIM safely off)

DINAH (*surprised*) Oo, I say !

(GEORGE hastily moves away)

GEORGE Hallo !

DINAH (*going up impetuously to him*) Give me one, too, George, Brian won't mind

BRIAN Really, Dinah, you are the limit

GEORGE (*formally, but enjoying it*) Do you mind, Mr Strange ?

BRIAN (*a little uncomfortably*) Oh, I say, sir——

GEORGE We'll risk it, Dinah (*He kisses her*)

DINAH (*triumphantly to BRIAN*) Did you notice that one ? That wasn't just an ordinary affectionate kiss It was a special bless-you-my-children one (*To GEORGE*) Wasn't it ?

OLIVIA You do talk nonsense, darling

DINAH Well, I'm so happy, now that Mr Pim has relented about your first husband——

(GEORGE catches OLIVIA's eye and smiles, she smiles back, but they are different smiles)

GEORGE (*the actor*) Yes, yes, stupid fellow Pim, what ?

BRIAN Absolute idiot

DINAH —And now that George has relented about my first husband

GEORGE You get on much too quickly, young woman (*To BRIAN*) So you want to marry my Dinah, eh ?

BRIAN (*with a smile*) Well I do rather, sir

DINAH (*hastily*) Not at once of course, George We want to be engaged for a long time first, and write letters to each other, and tell each other how much we love each other, and sit next to each other when we go out to dinner

GEORGE (*to OLIVIA*) Well, *that* sounds fairly harmless, I think

OLIVIA (*smiling*) I think so

GEORGE (*to BRIAN*) Then you'd better have a talk with me—er—Brian

BRIAN Thank you very much, sir

GEORGE Well, come along then (*Looking at his watch*) I am going up to town after tea, so we'd better—

DINAH I say! Are you going to London?

GEORGE (*with the smile of the conspirator*) A little business Never you mind, young lady

DINAH (*calmly*) All right Only, bring me back something nice

GEORGE (*to BRIAN*) Shall we walk down and look at the pigs?

BRIAN Righto!

OLIVIA Don't go far, dear I may want you in a moment

GEORGE All right, darling, we'll be on the terrace

[*They go out together*]

DINAH Brian and George always try to discuss me in front of the pigs So tactless of them Are you going to London, too, darling?

OLIVIA To-morrow morning

DINAH What are you going to do in London?

OLIVIA Oh, shopping, and—one or two little things

DINAH With George?

OLIVIA Yes

DINAH I say, wasn't it lovely about Pim?

OLIVIA Lovely?

DINAH Yes, he told me all about it Making such a hash of things, I mean

OLIVIA (*innocently*) Did he make a hash of things?

DINAH Well, I mean keeping on coming like that And

if you look at it all round—well, for all he had to say, he needn't really have come at all

OLIVIA (*smiling to herself*) I shouldn't quite say that, Dinah (*She stands up and shakes out the curtains*)

DINAH I say, aren't they jolly?

OLIVIA (*demurely*) I'm so glad everybody likes them Tell George I'm ready, will you?

DINAH I say, is *he* going to hang them up for you?

OLIVIA Well, I thought he could reach best

DINAH Righto! What fun! (*At the windows*) George! George! (*To OLIVIA*) Brian is just telling George about the five shillings he's got in the Post Office George!

GEORGE (*from the terrace*) Coming!

(*He hurries in, the model husband BRIAN follows*)

OLIVIA Oh, George, just hang these up for me, will you?

GEORGE Of course, darling I'll get the steps from the library

[*He hurries out*

(*BRIAN takes out his sketching block It is obvious that his five shillings has turned the scale He bows to DINAH He kisses OLIVIA's hand with an air He motions to DINAH to be seated*)

DINAH (*impressed*) What is it?

BRIAN (*beginning to draw*) Portrait of Lady Strange

(*GEORGE hurries in with the steps, and gets to work There is a great deal of curtain, and for the moment he becomes slightly involved in it However, by draping it over his head and shoulders, he manages to get successfully up the steps There we may leave him*

But we have not quite finished with MR PIM It is a matter of honour with him now that he should get his little story quite accurate before passing out of the MARDEN's life for ever So he comes back for the last time, for the last time we see his head at the window He whispers to OLIVIA)

MR PIM Mrs Marden! I've just remembered His name was *Ernest* Polwittle—not Henry

(*He goes off happily* *A curious family the*
MARDENS *Perhaps somebody else would have*
committed bigamy if he had not remembered
in time that it was Ernest *Ernest*
Yes *Now he can go back with an easy*
conscience to the Trevors)

AND STILL THEY COME—

January 1939

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